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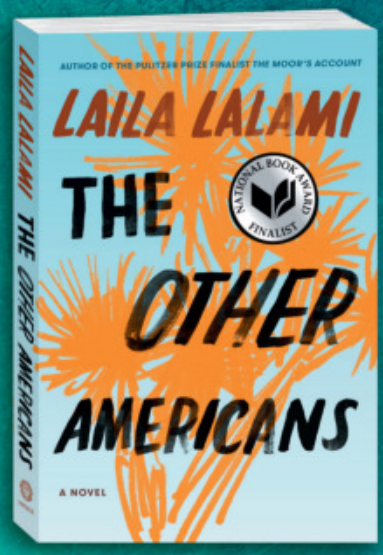
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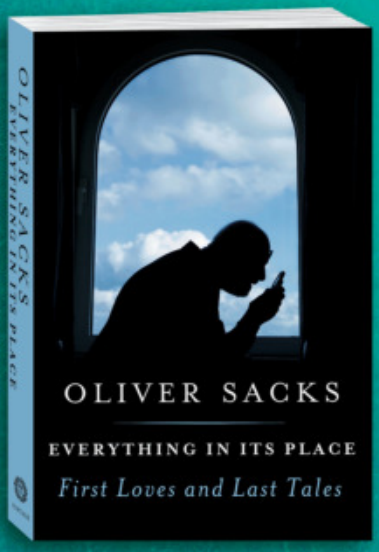

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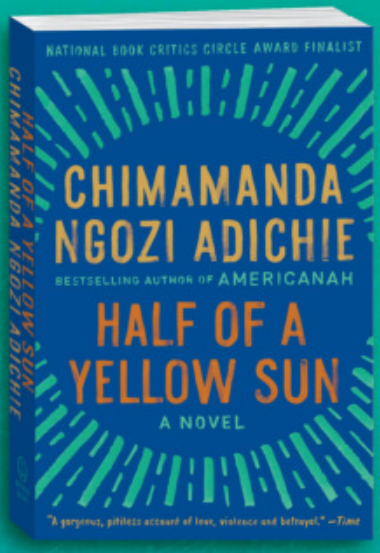
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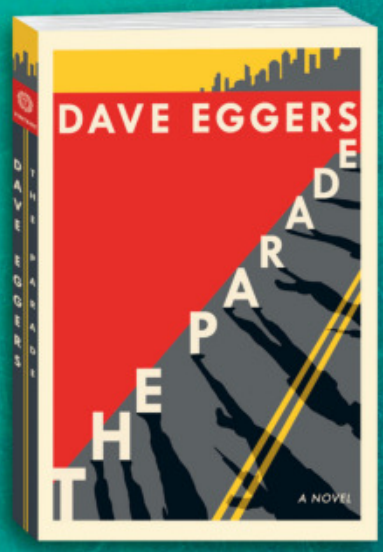

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APRIL 13, 2020

4 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

11 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
David Remnick on New York's empty streets; a view from the E.R.; the Navy's ship comes in; the death of a father; the front line of the grocery.

DEPT. OF SCIENCE

Matthew Hutson 16 Attack Mode
The search for the solution to the next virus.

SHOWCASE

Moises Saman 19 *Curfew begins in Amman, Jordan.*

LETTER FROM LOS ANGELES

Geoff Dyer 23 Home Alone Together
Solidarity in the new domesticity.

ANNALS OF GASTRONOMY

Bill Buford 26 Good Bread
Mastering the art of French baking.

34 DISPATCHES FROM A PANDEMIC
Twelve writers on life in the time of COVID-19.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

Ariel Levy 50 The Mission
Was a "white savior" in Uganda falsely accused?

FICTION

Tessa Hadley 62 "The Other One"

THE CRITICS

THE ART WORLD

Peter Schjeldahl 70 *The Old Masters and our transience.*

BOOKS

Casey Cep 73 *The radical faith of Dorothy Day.*
77 Briefly Noted
Dan Chiasson 78 *Joyelle McSweeney's "Toxicon and Arachne."*

ON TELEVISION

Doreen St. Félix 80 *"Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."*

POEMS

Deborah Garrison 20 "After Sex, Checking for Instagram Posts by My Kids, and Other Avoidance Strategies"
Arthur Sze 67 "Transpirations"

COVER

Pascal Campion "Lifeline"

DRAWINGS *Barbara Smaller, Roz Chast, Mike Twohy, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Tom Toro, P. C. Vey, Liana Finck, Ellis Rosen, Zachary Kanin, Frank Cotham, Brooke Bourgeois* SPOTS *Anthony Russo*

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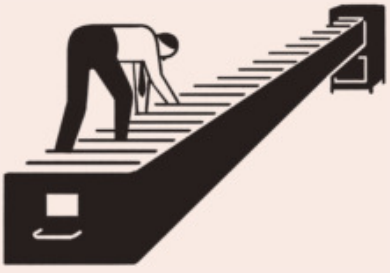

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THE NEW YORKER

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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

PERSONAL HISTORY
C Pam Zhang reflects on her father's death and her immigrant parents' psychological legacy.

POSTSCRIPT
Jonathan Blitzer on the life of Juan Sanabria, one of New York City's first coronavirus victims.

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LEFT: RACHEL LIU; RIGHT: COURTESY WALKIRIS CRUZ-PEREZ

THE MAIL

A SWIM IN THE SEA

Jill Lepore, in her chronicle of plague literature, reads Albert Camus's 1947 novel, "The Plague," as a parable ("Don't Come Any Closer," March 30th). The virus is Fascism, and the inevitable return of the disease is evidence of the failure of human sympathy. "Men will always become, again, rats," Lepore writes. But when I read "The Plague" with my ninth- and tenth-grade students in the fall of 2017, we found that Camus's text offered not just the darkness that Lepore cites but also a complex vision of resistance to it.

My students, in their essays, all wanted to analyze the same scene: a moment in which Bernard Rieux, a doctor and the book's narrator, escapes from the plague-ridden town with his partner in resistance, Jean Tarrou. They go for a swim in the sea. Their strokes synch up, and they find themselves in physical and mental sympathy with each other, "perfectly at one." Afterward, they must return to their plague-stricken patients. My students were attracted to this scene not only because it is a lyrical respite from the horrors of the text but because it offers the possibility of respite as a form of resistance.

The physical leap that Rieux and Tarrou take into the sea is made possible by an imaginative one: they free their minds, if only for a moment, from the grip of the plague. Lepore cites Rieux's assertion that "no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences." But he and Tarrou do not naïvely assume themselves to be free; they carve a form of freedom out of a landscape inimical to it. To resist the psychological effects of COVID-19, we need to find a form of imaginative freedom that, like Rieux and Tarrou's, does not ignore the pestilence. Camus calls this "a happiness that forgot nothing."

Kyra G. Morris
Princeton, N.J.

LESSONS FROM RUSSIA

Atul Gawande, in his excellent article about the rise in death rates among less educated working-class whites—"deaths of despair," as the economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton call them—overlooks a historical development that supports his thesis (Books, March 23rd). Gawande points out that death rates across the world have been falling for decades. This is generally true, but, after the collapse of Communism, in 1989, death rates in Russia and much of the former Soviet Union increased dramatically. While alcohol consumption played a key role in this surge, the underlying cause, as Case and Deaton suggest, was social disintegration. Throughout Russia, industrial employment collapsed, just as it has in the American Rust Belt. Income inequality soared, with vulture capitalists snatching state resources and becoming billionaires. Without the centralized command economy, many social and health services could no longer run. Non-state organizations that might have offered some social stability had been barred by the Soviet Union, and religion provided solace for only a portion of the population. For many Russian workers, the future was bleak, and deaths from violence, alcohol, and heart disease escalated.

In short, we saw in Russia twenty years ago what we see in America today—deteriorating economic conditions, ineffective social supports, and a health-care system that cannot effectively address self-destructive behavior or chronic disease. We know what has happened to Russian politics since the nineteen-nineties. The conditions in the U.S. that Gawande describes have led to our own flirtation with a leader who ignores the truth and manipulates the media. I hope that our country will not follow the path trod by Russia after its decade of deaths from despair.

Frank Feeley
Concord, Mass.

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THE NEW YORKER

In an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, New York City museums, galleries, theatres, music venues, cinemas, and restaurants have closed. Here's a selection of culture to be found online and streaming.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Like millions of people around the world, New Yorkers are staying at home. When they must go out—say, to walk the dog in **Prospect Park** (pictured)—the rule is social distancing. Fondly known as "Brooklyn's back yard," the park, which opened in 1867, was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the duo behind Central Park. To enjoy Prospect Park from afar, watch Brooklyn's own Danny Kaye on location there in the Academy Award-winning 1945 musical "Wonder Man" (streaming on the Criterion Channel).

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER FISHER

ART

Romare Bearden

From 1958 to 1962, this revered African-American painter put his vibrant representations of black culture and community on hold in order to experiment with geometric and geological surfaces. Among the magnetic highlights of the DC Moore gallery's online selection of these abstractions are "River Mist," made from torn pieces of canvas as variegated as slabs of labradorite and punctuated with flashes of orange, and "With Blue," in which a glacial shape of pale, drippy pigment rests on a saturated azure background. There are also examples of Bearden's later work, made after he returned, energized by the civil-rights movement, to his previous subject matter. The mixed-media painting "Feast," from 1969, is a lyrically deconstructed Last Supper that incorporates photographs of African masks; its striated structure resembles weathered bands of sediment. The piece indicates that the artist's abstract period was not a detour but a bridge to a new era of improvisation.—*Johanna Fateman (dcmooregallery.com)*

Jutta Koether

For her first show at the Lévy Gorvy gallery, now online only, this influential German painter, who splits her time between New York and Berlin, paired new work with deep cuts from the nineteen-eighties and nineties. The result is an abbreviated survey of sorts, full of art-historical echoes (from Max Ernst to Florine Stettheimer) and punk insouciance (YouTube has many videos of Koether's frequent collaborations with Kim Gordon). Neo-expressionist bluster is tempered with sardonic femininity—unfurling ribbons are a recurring motif. The most recent paintings are tightly focussed, attuned to the present moment; fluidly sketched pieces in fiery pinks and citrus are accompanied by more ambitious scenes, including the towering canvas "Neue Frau" ("New Woman"), in which a portrait of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez against a cityscape is attended by a blue streamer rising up from the bottom of the composition, as if rooting for the young congresswoman's ascent.—*J.F. (levygorvy.com)*

Willa Nasatir

This young American artist is best known for her painterly photographs, for which she shoots (and re-shoots) found-object assemblages, rendered otherworldly in her studio with mirrors and in-camera effects. The four paintings in her new show at Chapter (viewable online) are compositional cousins to those pictures, but they're also appealingly airier, with a springtime palette and swirly patterns that invite thoughts of Lilly Pulitzer gone experimental. The outlines of recognizable objects emerge from layered, abstract tangles. Zippers, a cougar's face, a bootprint, and a bird in flight are easy to spot; more ambiguous forms are lurking, too, if you look long enough at the jumbled shapes. A piece titled "Alligator" edges close to narrative: the reptile's snout overlaps with a figure in silhouette, dragging itself out of harm's way. Here, Nasatir's pastel, sun-dappled puzzle becomes a Trojan horse for drama.—*J.F. (chapter-ny.com)*

"Art at a Time Like This"

How can we think of art at a time like this? That question, posed by the New York curators Barbara Pollack and Anne Verhallen in this online-only exhibition, is answered in poignant and provocative ways by an eclectic group of international artists. Each of the posts (there are new entries daily) features images and a short reflection on the COVID-19 crisis. Ai Weiwei captures a pivotal moment with haunting photos from Wuhan in early February, of an intensive-care unit and the empty city center. In Rosana Paulino's watercolors of mythic entities, the Brazilian artist draws connections between her country's history of slavery and the consequences of Bolsonaro's far-right rule, exacerbated by the disease's spread. The New York artist Hunter Reynolds reflects on the devastation of another virus, H.I.V., in stitched photo collages that incorporate scans of newspaper clippings. Although art may be deemed nonessential in the current crisis, it is some consolation that artists are responding nonetheless.—*J.F. (artatatimelikethis.com)*

ART ONLINE

The equestrians riding into the angsty, orange sky in "Holiday" (pictured), by the Swedish painter **Mamma Andersson,** share the same DNA as Edvard Munch's screamer and the Romantic loners of Caspar David Friedrich, but if they had a soundtrack it might be "In My Room," by Brian Wilson. Most of the fourteen poetic pictures in Andersson's show "The Lost Paradise," at the Zwirner gallery (online at davidzwirner.com), are landscapes, at once specifically Nordic and timelessly placeless. But they feel interior, too—the rewards of an artist battling uncertainty alone in her studio, inventing a world. Especially striking are the portraits of trees, whose bark springs to life through Andersson's use of a new technique: oil stick, rubbed into the painted surfaces, leaves a trace so nubby that you can practically feel it, even onscreen. Andersson is married to the artist Jockum Nordström, a fellow-Swede who also exhibits at Zwirner; listen to the couple discuss the pleasures and the struggles of shared isolation on a new episode of "Dialogues," the gallery's terrific podcast series on the creative process, now in its third season.—*Andrea K. Scott*

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STREAMING BALLET

There may be no greater balm for the spirit than the ballets of the nineteenth-century Danish choreographer August Bournonville. As Bournonville wrote of his philosophy in his "Choreographic Credo," "Dance is essentially an expression of joy." His 1842 ballet, **"Napoli,"** inspired by his travels to the southern Italian city the year before, is a perfect example: a loving portrait of a place teeming with life, in which fishermen ply their wares on the town square, a street singer belts out a tune, and, in the end, everyone dances. The music includes snatches of Neapolitan songs and "The Barber of Seville." The ballet is a jewel in the repertoire of the Royal Danish Ballet, which is currently streaming a recording of the piece on its Web site. The staging, from the 2013-14 season, is an update by the company's director, Nikolaj Hübbe, who moved the action to the nineteen-fifties and added neorealist touches. Despite some over-the-top moments—particularly in the second act—it still has much to offer, principally the crisp, detailed mime and dancing, and the dashing presence of the young Danish star Alban Lendorf.—*Marina Harss*

DANCE

Abrons Arts Center

This Lower East Side theatre has postponed its spring season, but it has made work from previous seasons available on Vimeo. Footage of "Let 'im Move You: This Is a Formation," from 2019, is a glimpse, for anybody who needs one, of what isn't possible under social isolation. The production—part of a series by jumatatu m. poe and Jermone Donte Beacham that explores J-Sette, a dance form developed by majorettes in historically black colleges and adopted by queer black men—is loose and convivial, as much party as performance. Via a mingling camera, viewers can soak in the atmosphere or skip to the call-and-response moves and dance at home.—*Brian Seibert*

Alvin Ailey

Unable to perform in public, the amazing dancers of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre haven't stopped inspiring audiences. They've been filming themselves dancing, separate and isolated wherever they might be, and then combining the footage in short videos on Instagram. The company has also started streaming full-length performances, for limited periods, on its Web site. The offerings—which started, naturally, with "Revelations"—continue, on April 9, with Judith Jamison's "Divining." In the coming weeks, look for Camille A. Brown's grief-defying "City of Rain" and, especially, Rennie Harris's "Lazarus," whose mix of painful searching and pleasure in the groove should feel even more potent now.—*B.S.*

NYTB / Chamberworks

The company formerly known as New York Theatre Ballet is one of the few places you can see the work of the twentieth-century British choreographer Antony Tudor these days. Rigorous and taut, these ballets are all the more intense for the contained manner in which they are performed. The company has put several of them online, including "Dark Elegies" and "Jardin aux Lilas," both from the nineteen-thirties. "Dark Elegies" is an exposition of communal grief—a timely theme—set to Mahler's song cycle "Kindertotenlieder." In "Jardin aux Lilas," four people are caught in a quadrangle of impossible love during a rather gloomy afternoon garden party. The dancers of this New York-based chamber company perform the works—which can be viewed on Vimeo—with bracing sincerity.—*Marina Harss*

PODCASTS

"Dead Eyes"

Delight can come from unexpected places, including this series from the character actor and U.C.B. stalwart Connor Ratliff, known for his mind-bending Twitter mega-threads (on the œuvre of Elvis Costello, say, or of Porky Pig) and for such roles as Chester, the creepy Catskills grifter on "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel." In the podcast, Ratliff delves into, as he puts it, "a deeply unimportant question that has haunted me for nearly twenty years": Why did Tom Hanks fire Ratliff from a small speaking role in the 2001 miniseries "Band of Brothers"? (Hint: see podcast title.) In probing themes of opportunity, rejection, and turning failure into art, Ratliff and his guests (including Jon Hamm, Rian Johnson, and Aimee Mann) manage a level of entertainment and tonal nuance that is, frankly, surprising, while fondly connecting those themes to Hanksian touchstones such as "That Thing You Do!" and David S. Pumpkins.—*Sarah Larson*

"Floodlines"

Hosted and reported by Vann R. Newkirk II, this masterly new series from *The Atlantic*, released just as our full-on national pandemic panic began, chronicles another story of American catastrophe and mismanagement—post-Katrina New Orleans, after the levees broke. We hear the voices of people who lived through it, such as Alice Craft-Kerney, a nurse at Charity Hospital, and Fred Johnson, who took refuge in the Hyatt Hotel and got deputized to protect it. ("The level of fear that was in that room, I was trying not to visualize it," he says.) The series yields fresh insights about institutional racism, contemporary media, and upended norms while avoiding the stylistic clichés of both investigative podcasts and New Orleans narratives, and Newkirk, a warm and wise presence, deftly balances the personable (Johnson, he says, "has no fear of the patterned shirt") and the serious.—*S.L.*

MUSIC

DJ Harvey: "Live at Rumors"

HOUSE One of the d.j.s whose career path was set during the London acid-house explosion of the late eighties, DJ Harvey is a master at moving between tracks in such a logical manner that his sets can feel like long exhalations. "Live at Rumors"—a two-and-a-half-hour mix recorded this past May, at a Los Angeles block party—was recently made available on Bandcamp for a dollar (the proceeds will be donated to coronavirus relief). His selections are heavy on dub

ILLUSTRATION BY ELENI KALORKOTI

effects; there's a sleek sense of displacement, with synthesizer lines glowing like neon tubing over loose drums. The set builds almost imperceptibly until, near the end, the late Hi-NRG pioneer Patrick Cowley's romping "Get a Little" explodes the tension.—*Michaelangelo Matos*

Empress Of: "I'm Your Empress Of"

ELECTRO-POP As Empress Of, Lorely Rodriguez creates shimmery electro-pop with a subtle dance pulse. On her new album, "I'm Your Empress Of," that kinetic energy completely spills over: songs such as "Love Is a Drug" and "Give Me Another Chance" are charged with a tinselly menagerie of upbeat club and house influences. Her approach is decisive and full of adrenaline, but she brings sensitivity to the volcanic production; Rodriguez's mother's voice appears in recordings throughout the album, sharing stories of her experiences and resilience as an immigrant and offering words of encouragement to her daughter.—*Julyssa Lopez*

Daniel Hope: "Belle Epoque"

CHAMBER MUSIC The British violinist Daniel Hope released his double album "Belle Epoque" in February, before the coronavirus outbreak had been declared a pandemic and nations began their unprecedented lockdown efforts. Originally, Hope intended the set to be a lavish tribute to an era remembered with optimism, when the arts flourished and late Romanticism hadn't yet surrendered to modernism in the wake of the First World War. Listening to Hope's album now, its pangs of nostalgia for a vibrant period before a shared global trauma feel especially acute. He delivers shimmery melodies by Debussy, Massenet, and a young Schoenberg with softness and care in an acoustic environment that favors gauzy warmth, and the Zürcher Kammerorchester offers sumptuous support. It's a balm in hard times, which Hope understands; for the past two weeks, he's live-streamed a daily series called "Hope at Home" for cloistered audiences around the world.—*Oussama Zahr*

Clarice Jensen: "The experience of repetition as death"

CHAMBER MUSIC Lately, the cellist Clarice Jensen, a co-founder of the versatile new-music group American Contemporary Music Ensemble, has turned her attention to fashioning solo works that use electronic effects. The idiom might seem ideal for our present state of isolation, but the music on her album "The experience of repetition as death" rejects meditative navel-gazing. Jensen deploys loops and layers to evoke the experience of attending to her terminally ill mother in her final weeks, adopting concepts from Freud and the feminist poet Adrienne Rich as structural ideas. Simple repetitions in "Daily" call to mind a caretaker's elementary chores—their toll is implied as the music's edges gradually soften and blur. Jensen's electronically enhanced vocabulary can astonish: a guttural drone in "Day Tonight" resembles Tibetan chant, and, in "Metastable," the incessant beep of hospital monitors morphs into a stately pipe-organ étude. "Holy Mother," a mountainous, windswept threnody, and "Final," where nostalgic crackles preface a plainspoken, hymnlike chorale, complete this album of near-supernatural potency.—*Steve Smith*

Harold Mabern: "Mabern Plays Mabern"

JAZZ New Orleans may have spawned jazz, but by the mid-fifties Memphis was turning out significant musicians in the genre by the bushel. Among the city's titans was the pianist and composer Harold Mabern, who died last September, at the age of eighty-three, still gigging until the end. Mabern established himself in New York and, thanks to his experience as a supporting player, became an indispensable component of the scene—an individual stylist who could dependably enhance the work of others. His own fine recordings spotlighted his earthy, blues-drenched take on bop and modern styles in his engaging and direct compositions. A newly released live album, "Mabern Plays Mabern," recorded in 2018, finds him playing alongside the younger acolytes who worked with him as trusted compatriots during the last thirty years of his life, including the tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, the bassist John Webber, and the drummer Joe Farnsworth. A blend of sharp originals and standards, the music swings hard—when Mabern took any bandstand, you expected nothing less.—*Steve Futterman*

NNAMDÏ: "BRAT"

ART POP The only constant in NNAMDÏ's world is change; the restless Chicago multi-instrumentalist has performed in outfits as disparate as screamo and hip-hop. His new album, "BRAT," journeys through a maze of genres, revealing with each turn a broad appetite and staggering musical proficiency. The silvery track "Wasted" collapses breezy rap and quirky R. & B. into the gossamer haze of a hymn; elsewhere, on "Perfect in My Mind," contrast is the rule, with dynamic drums and guitars imbuing the track with rock drama even as his vocals remain pillowy-pop soft. Despite its mishmash of sounds, "BRAT" is remarkably cohesive—its quirkiest moments don't sacrifice accessibility, and its more familiar gestures still feel unique. The record works as both a new chapter in NNAMDÏ's colorful portfolio and a worthwhile introduction for those who may be unfamiliar; bask in its pleasures, but don't get too comfortable.—*Briana Younger*

PARTYNEXTDOOR: "PARTYMOBILE"

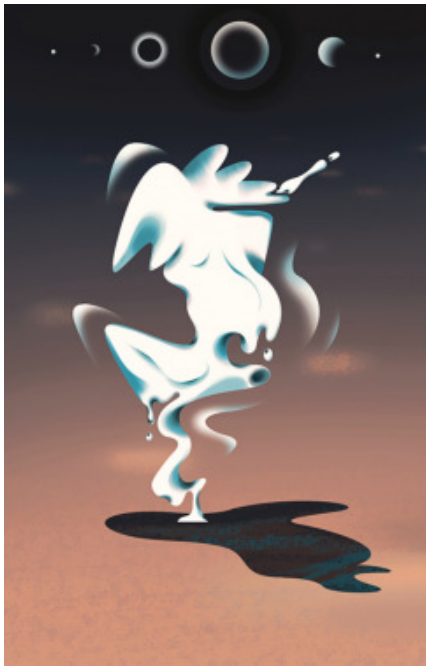
R. & B. When Jahron Brathwaite started making music under the alias PARTYNEXTDOOR, the Canadian singer and producer cut a figure that was mysterious and somewhat hard to pin down. He had an added boost to his profile as the first artist Drake signed to his OVO Sound imprint, but his style made wider recognition elusive; his beats were moody and full of shadows that felt like hideaways. However, on "PARTYMOBILE," his latest album, his production is confident, and his song choices—including a collaboration with Rihanna that marks her first musical appearance in three years—are bold power moves, transforming an anonymous sound into a signature.—*J.L.*

MOVIES

I Am Not a Witch

In the Zambian writer and director Rungano Nyoni's first feature, from 2017, a quiet eight-year-old girl (Maggie Mulubwa) is accused by her fellow-villagers of being a witch, and is sent to an encampment of witches, all of whom are adult women who are kept tethered to straps, to prevent them from fleeing. Their compound serves as a tourist attraction; during off-hours,

EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC



There remains something powerful about black musicians creating outside the bounds of genre, and **Yves Tumor's** artistic impulses are as sonically defiant as they are destructive. "Heaven to a Tortured Mind" is a passionate world unto itself, an album that converts enigma into star power and strikes a potent balance between the cerebral and the visceral. The mind can identify the compositional brilliance of "Gospel for a New Century," the lush musicality of "Kerosene!," or the sumptuous vocal textures of "A Greater Love," but even when those qualities blur into an unidentifiable oblivion—as on the phenomenally unhinged "Medicine Burn"—it's the goosebumps on the arms, the tightening of the chest, the butterflies in the stomach that imprint Yves Tumor's music on the soul. To try to define it is to miss the point.—*Briana Younger*

ILLUSTRATION BY QIEER WANG

they're forced to do farm work. The girl, whom the women name Shula ("uprooted," in Nyanja), plays her role to the hilt: she's employed as a diviner who, taking the place of judge and jury, identifies criminals on sight, and is summoned to end a drought, with tragic consequences. Nyoni depicts a wide range of misogynistic abuses of power, as when Mr. Banda (Henry B.J. Phiri), Shula's "state guardian" with the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Beliefs, protects her as "government property." Nyoni's frank, confrontational style is both derisive and empathetic; she extracts powerful symbolic images from the oppressive environment. In English and Nyanja.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on the Criterion Channel, Amazon, and other services.)*

Johnny O'Clock

This terse and taut film noir, from 1947, is centered on the romantic and professional conflicts of the title character, the criminal mastermind (played by Dick Powell) behind a posh illegal casino. Yet the action is rooted in the woes of the wider world—it begins with accusations of unwarranted police violence, continues with a woman's domestic-violence complaint, and highlights an immigrant's resentment of his own bigoted mistreatment. The film's writer and director, Robert Rossen, sets up a multidimensional chess game, for mortal stakes, between Johnny, his glad-handing boss (Thomas Gomez), his boss's wife (Ellen Drew), a cagey police inspector (Lee J. Cobb), and a scuffling actress (Evelyn Keyes) whose sister (Nina Foch) worked at the casino and dated a corrupt detective (Jim Bannon). The caustically epigrammatic script, the cast's suavely controlled gestures of love and menace, and Rossen's thrillingly restrained and stylishly assertive images (as well as his political conscience) make this pugnacious yet intricate spectacle a hidden classic of the genre.—*R.B. (Streaming on the Criterion Channel.)*

The Last Days of Chez Nous

Gillian Armstrong's 1993 movie is set in a ramshackle Sydney household, where an Australian family gets on with its life, but only just. Beth (Lisa Harrow) starts to lose her French husband, J.P. (Bruno Ganz), to the attentions of her sister, Vicki (Kerry Fox); meanwhile, Beth's daughter, Annie (Miranda Otto), is falling quietly for Tim (Kiri Paramore), their lodger with a crewcut and a sense of humor. Jokes at the dinner table can turn nasty and upsetting, but people also recover quickly, and sometimes dance without warning. This fluent, hopeful comedy (and it is a comedy, for all the encroachments of sadness) charts every shift in the emotional climate. It's a true ensemble movie: none of the performances are vain or showy—Harrow in particular braves all manner of self-exposure, and we can see the fear beneath her strength. Beth longs to keep the house in order, but everyone else is itching to relax or break free—you can see it in the look of the film, the way that figures mess around within careful compositions.—*Anthony Lane (Streaming on Netflix and other services.)*

Never Rarely Sometimes Always

Eliza Hittman's third feature tells a spare story in compelling detail: Autumn Callahan (Sidney Flanigan), a seventeen-year-old high-school student in a small Pennsylvania town, learns that she's pregnant. Unable to get an abortion in that state without parental consent, she travels to New York, with her cousin Skylar (Talia Ryder), for the procedure. Hittman, who also wrote the script, stays intimately close to Autumn, spotlighting her cramped life at home and in school, her independent-minded ferocity, and her physical sufferings (including attempts at ending the pregnancy herself). But, above all, this is a drama of social fabric—of the impact of policy and prejudice on the daily thicket of administrative details, the nerve-jangling tension that women endure from ambient sexual aggression, and the oppressive air of surveillance and terror sparked by the war against abortion. The young women's journey to New York—and their encounter with a Philadelphia hipster (Théodore Pellerin)—offers an anguished apprenticeship in the wider world's network of money and power.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon, iTunes, and other services.)*

Pain and Gain

Michael Bay directed this rowdy, raunchy, gleefully swaggering true-crime tale, set in the mid-nineties, about a vain and ambitious Miami bodybuilder, Daniel Lugo (Mark Wahlberg), who is stuck working as a trainer at a gym. He decides to kidnap a rich client, Victor Kershaw (Tony Shalhoub), with the help of a mild-mannered colleague (Anthony Mackie), and a mighty, penitent ex-con (Dwayne Johnson). The three stooges amplify one another's mistakes in an echo chamber of increasingly bloody and brutal idiocy that attracts the attention of a principled private eye (Ed Harris). The frantic script gives the characters snappy foot-in-mouth arias; with slow-motion shots and slam-cuts, kinetic thrills and cocked angles, Bay captures sensational delusions of grandeur as well as panicked energy whirling out of control. The tangy flotilla of side characters—including a motivational huckster (Ken Jeong) and a sex therapist (Rebel Wilson)—seems to be having a rollicking good time selling the tall tale. Released in 2013.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon, YouTube, and other services.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

WHAT TO STREAM

COURTESY MUG-SHOT PRODUCTIONS

The title of the series "Space Is the Place: Afrofuturism on Film, the Sequel," which was to have run at BAM through April 9, comes from a 1972 movie featuring Sun Ra, whose combination of music and theatrics, metaphysical poetics and communal living, opened a new and visionary dimension in jazz and in culture at large. Robert Mugge's 1980 documentary, **"Sun Ra—A Joyful Noise"** (streaming on Amazon and iTunes), provides a revelatory showcase for Sun Ra's art, which was anchored by a nucleus of musicians living and rehearsing in a house in Philadelphia, joined by others on a temporary basis to make a big band. Its repertoire ranged from amped-up versions of swing and bop to cosmic storms of fury issuing from Sun Ra's electronic keyboards. Vigorously roving long takes of ecstatic concert performances—some involving the collective frenzies of free jazz, others bringing audiences to their feet with jaunty percussion, chant, and dance—display the bandleader's self-described practice of discipline and precision even as he discusses, in interviews with Mugge, the political protest reflected in his transcendental philosophy.—*Richard Brody*

TABLES FOR TWO

Chefs Take to Instagram

The other day, the chef Tom Colicchio, whose four restaurants in New York are currently closed, posted a short video on Instagram, demonstrating how he was using leftover roasted Brussels sprouts and carrots to make lunch. (Or was it breakfast? A fried egg was involved. The hours, and the meals, have begun to blur.) He started by drizzling some oil into a pan. "Does it matter what oil?" whispered the person behind the camera. "No. Right now, nothing matters!" Colicchio responded, chuckling.

Emma Bengtsson, the executive chef of Aquavit, in east midtown, filmed herself preparing an easy meat sauce for pasta. She had ordered a tripod online, she said, but it would take two weeks to arrive; in the meantime, she was using a head of broccoli to prop up her phone. She would normally add green olives to her sauce, but her grocery store had been cleaned out.

Eric Ripert showcased a smoked-salmon grilled cheese and an incredibly simple butternut-squash soup, the likes of which you would never find at his restaurant Le Bernardin. In one caption, he included a warning to would-be detractors. "If you are a great Chef-Cook, a purist and have access to . . . abundant diverse ingredients, great equipment etc," he wrote, "I am very happy for you and if my cooking methods are not interesting enough for you . . . don't bother following and posting negative comments."

In the wake of their restaurants closing, many of New York's most prominent chefs are agitating on behalf of their desperately strapped industry by organizing employee-relief funds, writing op-eds, and urging constituents to call their representatives to demand government aid. In the moments in between, many are taking to the Internet to share tutorials, tips, and glimpses of what they're up to in isolation.

Their posts are, on some level, meant to inspire. But what I like best about them is how forgiving they are, how they let the home cook off the hook. If you want help making sourdough bread—a finicky and time-consuming project, just the sort that many are seeking right now—you can find it in spades. If you only have the time and energy to focus on feeding yourself (and not a needy levain starter) with limited resources, look to restaurant chefs, who are usually so busy cooking elaborately for other people that they've developed a special shorthand for cooking for themselves. You can learn it, too.

"The microwave," declared David Chang, of Momofuku, in a recent post, "is a machine from the future here in present day. If you think a microwave is bad for you . . . throw away your smartphone." He used his to "hammer" (kitchen slang for "overcook") some sausage with olive oil, garlic, onion, and chili flakes. Then he boiled orecchiette, adding "old broccoli rabe" and turnip and radish tops to the water at the last minute, and mixed everything together with MSG and fish sauce, because he didn't have Parmesan cheese. "This is not how you cook in a restaurant," he wrote. "Who cares . . . tasted great."

Christina Tosi, the force behind Milk Bar, has launched a baking club on Instagram Live; prior to each meeting, she posts photos of piles of various ingredients, informing her followers that they need only one item from each array, Mad Libs style. If you don't have all-purpose flour for cutout cookies, you can grind oats in a blender, or even use Bisquick pancake mix. If you don't have a rolling pin, you can use a wine bottle or a foam muscle roller.

Rita Sodi, the chef behind I Sodi and Via Carota, offered a recipe for humble potatoes, fried with sage. Natasha Pickowicz, of Café Altro Paradiso and Flora Bar, posted dreamy doodles of cakes and galettes. For months, Frederico Ribeiro, who co-owns Té Company, a West Village tea shop and restaurant, with his wife, Elena Liao, has been using Instagram Stories to document how they eat at home, in a charmingly deadpan series he calls "Chez Fred." Recently, while making breakfast sandwiches, he noted that he'd forgotten to rub garlic on the bread before he spread it with mustard, "so I'm just gonna rub the garlic around the bread." "Seriously?" said Liao, off camera. Later, she sighed deeply. "Oh, what a stressful time."

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC HELGAS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
LIFE AT THE EPICENTER

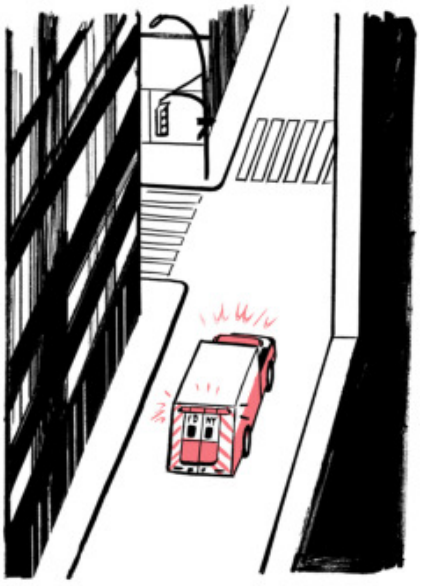
The streets of New York City are so desolate now that you half expect tumbleweed to blow along the pavement where cars and cabs once clustered. There is barely a plane in the sky. You hear the wheeze of an empty bus rounding a corner, the flutter of pigeons on a fire escape, the wail of an ambulance. The sirens are unnervingly frequent. But even on these sunny, early-spring days there are few people in sight. For weeks, as the distancing rules of the pandemic took hold, a gifted saxophone player who stakes his corner outside a dress shop on Broadway every morning was still there, playing "My Favorite Things" and "All the Things You Are." Now he is gone, too.

The spectacle of New York without New Yorkers is the result of a communal pact. We have absented ourselves from the schools and the playgrounds, the ballparks and the bars, the places where we work, because we know that life now depends on our withdrawal from life. The vacancy of our public spaces, though antithetical to the purpose of a great city, which is defined by the constancy and the poetry of its encounters, is needed for its preservation.

And so you stick your head out the window of an apartment that you haven't left in days and look down and around. You wait awhile before you see a single scurrying soul, her arms full of groceries. She's wearing a mask and walking with the urgency of a thief. She crosses Broadway, past blooming magnolias on the traffic divider. She quickens her step and heads toward Amsterdam Avenue. Like all of us, she is trying to outrun the thing she cannot see. You close the window and wash your hands for the fourteenth time that day. "Happy birthday to you . . ." Twenty seconds of it. Never less.

"On any person who desires such queer prizes, New York will bestow the gift of loneliness and the gift of privacy," E. B. White wrote, in the summer of 1948. But these queer prizes are now a public-health requirement. Because New Yorkers are not medieval monks, we mostly chafe at the imposed solitude. We do our best to overcome it through technologies that White would have had a hard time imagining: We text. We Zoom. We send one another links about virology. (We are all immunologists now.)

We watch televised briefings that are as long as art-house movies. The politicians review the bullet points of the day, nearly all of them ominous. The reporters sit at least six feet apart, when they do not phone in their plaintive questions, asking, in sum: Do we have the medicine, the equipment, the food we need to keep going? When can we go out again? And then you ask yourself if you need more liquid soap. The hours are as long as evening shadows.



But then something happens. Joy comes at seven. (Or is it sheer catharsis?) Every evening, in many neighborhoods across the city, cheering breaks out, the way it would when the Yankees clinched another World Series title. It spills from the stoops and the sidewalks, from apartment windows and rooftops, for all the nurses, orderlies, doctors, E.M.T.s—everyone who cannot shelter in place and continues to go about healing the people of the city.

We take out our smartphones and record the roar outside: the clapping and the whooping, the tambourines and wind chimes, the vuvuzelas. The guy across the street is a master of the cowbell. Before it all dies down, we've sent off the recording to a loved one who works as an E.R. doc—and to others who are sick in bed or out of range of our anxious, canyoned city—the city described every minute on cable news as "the epicenter."

What's being applauded at seven is the courage of professionals, many of them working without the protective gear they need. Some have seen their salaries cut; some have fallen ill, others soon will. We're applauding the likes of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

Anthony Fauci, who must spend nearly as much mental energy trying to finesse the ignorance and the ego of his Commander-in-Chief as he does in assessing the course of the novel coronavirus. We're cheering researchers in labs all over the world who are at work on antivirals and potential vaccines. We're cheering everyone who makes it possible for the city to avoid the myriad conceivable shortfalls and collapses: grocery clerks and ambulance drivers; sanitation workers; pharmacists and mail carriers; truckers, cops, and firemen; the deliveryman who shrugs off the straps of his knapsack and jabs the intercom buzzer with a gloved finger; the community of artists, dancers, d.j.s, musicians, and actors who have lost paychecks and jobs but are posting paintings on Instagram, FaceTiming soliloquies, singing into iPhones. And we're thanking those who are providing straight information, lobbying Washington for medical supplies, looking out for the most vulnerable among us, and making critical decisions based on the scientific evidence, no matter how unforgiving. We know the limits of this release—there is a feeling of helplessness reflected in it, too—but it's what we have in a dark time.

And there is no question of the darkness. Last Tuesday, President Trump presided over a two-hour news conference at which he fleetingly appeared to bow before realities that he had airily dismissed for so long and at our collective peril—the most chilling fact being that, even with effective strategies of social distancing, perhaps one or two hundred thousand Americans could die in this pandemic. "As sobering a number as that is, we should be prepared for it," Fauci said, as the President stood nearby, seeming, for once in his life, humbled.

These next weeks and months will be demanding in ways that are hard to fathom. If New Yorkers are in hiding, the virus has shown a knack for seeking. But, with time, life will return to the city. Our city and your city. The doors will open and we will leave our homes. We will meet again. We will greet our friends, face to face, at long-delayed Easter services and Passover Seders. Children will attend class with their teachers. Sidewalks and stores and theatres will fill. Remnants of the crisis—a box of nitrile gloves, a bag of makeshift masks; containers of drying Clorox wipes—will be tucked away, out of sight and out of mind. We'll forget a lot about our city's suspended life. But we will remember what, and who, we lost. We'll remember the cost of time squandered. And we will remember the sound of seven o'clock.

—David Remnick

IN THE E.R.
RAMPING UP

For ten years, I've been an attending emergency-medicine physician at Brooklyn Methodist Hospital, in Park Slope. As E.R. doctors, we pride ourselves on being cool in a crisis. After years of practice and training, I have become desensitized to the blood, the urine, the feces, the vomit, and the screaming. It's rare that I ever feel stress, despite all the crazy things I've seen. Things can get loud and out of control. If you demand silence, it completely changes the energy in the room. But this cool, it's a learned behavior. There's an adage from Samuel Shem's novel of hospital life, "The House of God," that your first procedure at a cardiac arrest is to check your own pulse. But now, in the time of pandemic, we may be finding ourselves tachycardic.

There are sixty-odd hospitals in the city, and all of us who work in them are approaching the point of being overwhelmed. Somehow, my biggest fear now, with COVID-19, is that this learned ability to be cool and collected will get lost. I don't feel that way yet. But we're getting there.

As the pandemic ramps up, I'm working twelve-hour shifts, six days a week. I've picked up extra shifts to cover for doctors who are already sick. During a typical shift, you might intubate one patient who is critically ill. Three would be a lot. On my last shift, we intubated ten. Each day now, we're turning away hundreds of patients who definitely have the symptoms of COVID-19. Even when patients come in with an unrelated trauma that requires a chest X-ray, you *incidentally* find they've got it. The extent of community spread is unreal. You begin to realize that, without comprehensive testing, we are radically underestimating the spread of this virus.

Planning for disasters is part of emergency medicine. We run drills for events like a bomb in the subway or, yes, a pandemic respiratory illness. When they're over, all the participants invariably pat themselves on the back for how well they did. But, no matter how much you plan, reality is different. You think you're ready. Then reality comes. And you're not.

During the Ebola outbreak, we practiced "donning and doffing"—the art of putting on and taking off your P.P.E., personal protective equipment. You have to apply your gown, gloves, and mask in such a way that you are completely protected. While examining the patient, you become coated with viral particles. So, when you remove your P.P.E., you have to be careful not to contaminate yourself. It's not easy. Now there is a national shortage of P.P.E.—but no shortage of infected patients—and some doctors and nurses are wearing a disposable mask and gown for an entire shift.

If our intensive-care units get overwhelmed, we're going to be faced with some difficult choices. And we aren't used to that in this country. Traditionally, the American medical system is focussed on aggressive healing at all costs, sometimes in the face of medical futility to the detriment of the patient's comfort. When I rotated through the I.C.U. as a resident, I had a patient with an overwhelming bacterial infection. She had been bed-bound, nonverbal, and ventilator-dependent for a decade. I tried to have a discussion with her daughter about end-of-life care. The daughter simply said, "My mother survived Auschwitz. Who am I to put an end to her life?" In this brave new world of COVID-19 infections, a nursing-home patient like this is at particular risk. Will we be forced to shift the emphasis of our bioethical values away from our "do everything" approach?

Emergency rooms are the country's safety net. We work around the clock, and we're proud to take care of people

no one else is taking care of. And yet, for the first time in my career, I feel truly appreciated by society. The mood at work has changed. Before this, it was not uncommon to be cursed out by—understandably—angry, stressed people who are in pain and tired of waiting. I always joke that you want to be ignored in an emergency room. If everyone's ignoring you, then you're probably not sick enough to warrant immediate attention. If, instead, you see a lot of E.R. doctors getting really excited and paying a lot of attention to your case, then you should probably be a little nervous. The patients who now need me most can't speak. They're gasping for breath. Or they're "altered"—they're out of it mentally, either from lack of oxygen or from direct viral infection of the brain.

There is something psychologically taxing about working a day shift at the E.R. No matter how hard you work, the day just keeps getting more and more intense—more patients, more illness—until you reach a crescendo of misery, and you walk out the door completely spent. On a night shift, you come into the E.R. at its busiest and most chaotic. People are screaming, someone is running naked through the department, all hell is breaking loose. But you take this chaotic landscape and transform it. Things begin to taper off at midnight. Patients get admitted. Most have gone home. And, when the shift's over, you walk out into the morning light.

This morning, on my way home, I went into someplace to get a cup of coffee. A woman saw me in my scrubs and she insisted on buying my coffee. After years of being abused in the E.R., it's amazing the appreciation people have shown. The E.R. is flooded with food that people are sending us: Thai, Turkish, regular pizza, fancy pizza. And, this being Park Slope, a nice kale salad, too. There's so much food around now that one of the residents said we're all going to gain "the COVID-15."

—Jessica van Voorhees

DEPT. OF NAVIGATION
BRINGING IN THE COMFORT

The Navy hospital ship Comfort went under the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge at about nine-twenty last Monday morning. Trucks on the bridge blew long blasts of welcome on their horns. The ship appeared suddenly in the overcast day as if out of nowhere; the medical-clinic white of her hull and superstructure blended in with the sea and the sky. In Von Briesen Park, on Staten Island, ship-watchers had set up cameras on tripods six feet or more apart on a bluff overlooking the Narrows. The MarineTraffic mobile app told them what time the ship would arrive. Four McAllister tugboats awaited the Comfort just north of the bridge, their bows pointing toward her. As she passed, they swung around and escorted her in. Another tug, carrying film crews, veered among a wider entourage of police and Coast Guard boats, and private craft practicing police-enforced nautical distancing, all under a small, hovering flock of helicopters.

At the helm, Captain Timothy Ferrie, a Sandy Hook pilot, licensed and skilled in local waters, had control of the ship—the "conn," as pilots and ships' crews call it. Captain Ferrie had piloted a tanker out of the harbor and into the open ocean the day before, spent the night on the pilots' station boat, twelve miles out, and received the assignment to bring the Comfort in in the morning. He dressed in a coat and tie (customary attire for pilots meeting a ship), put on a respirator mask, and climbed up the ship's twenty-foot ladder. On the ship's bridge, he and the captain and others on hand kept a safe and cordial distance. The sea was calm, with three-foot swells, and the tide almost slack.

As the ship made her way slowly by, the watchers at Von Briesen Park moved along the fence to follow her, each at a distance from the next, like football defensemen staying in their lanes. Farther along the bluff, it was hard to see the ship through the trees, one of which, a beech, had the names of Rob, Chris, and Eileen carved onto it. Soon, wakes from the boat traffic began splashing onto the rocks at the base of the bluff with sighing noises. In Manhattan and along the shoreline in New Jersey, the people who came out to see the ship were not so careful, as news photos showed. The crowds bunched together in heedless camaraderie, no doubt encouraged by the arrival of the floating thousand-bed hospital with the red crosses on her side; watching a ship come in can lift the spirits enormously. (Later, the hope would seem to be misplaced. The Comfort was not intended for COVID-19 cases, and the small number of other patients that the ship accepted in the days after docking has been little help to the city's hard-pressed hospital system so far.)

Just north of Chelsea Piers, the docking pilot, Captain Robert Ellis, from one of the McAllister tugs, climbed aboard and took over from Captain Ferrie. He brought the ship upstream and, mostly by means of his tugboats' nudging, turned her ninety degrees, into the slip at Pier 90, which had been dredged out in a high-priority dredging marathon to accommodate her. The last watcher in Von Briesen Park stayed until the ship and the distant haze of downtown Manhattan could barely be distinguished from each other. Later, by way of a network of New York pilots, he reached both Captain Ferrie and Captain Ellis on their phones. "My family have been Sandy Hook pilots since 1882," Captain Ferrie said, while on his way home to Point Pleasant, New Jersey. "And it's kind of ironical, because my older brother William Ferrie was the liaison between the pilots and the Comfort when George Bush sent her to New York Harbor after September 11th. William is now retired, and his son, Thomas, also became a pilot, so that's the fifth generation of pilots in our family."

Captain Ellis said, "Docking this ship

was not much different than docking any tanker, although it's easier to pull up parallel to a dock than to make a ninety-degree turn. The Hudson River had a little current, fed by freshets from upstream with local rains, and melting snow farther up, in the Adirondacks. I talked our tug captains through it—I've known all of them for many years. Everything went well. I saw there was a crowd waiting on the pier, with politicians and publicity, and I wanted as little contact as possible, so I boarded a tug near the stern and it took me back to our dock in Staten Island."

Captain Ferrie: "It was an honor to cede the conn to Captain Ellis, one of the best docking pilots ever. I've been piloting for forty years, and I've brought thousands of ships in and out of the harbor, including Navy ships. One year during Fleet Week I piloted the John F. Kennedy, a thousand-foot-long aircraft carrier that has since been decommissioned. But piloting the Comfort, and being part of her work here, has been the proudest day of my life."

—Ian Frazier

A SON'S STORY

LIFELINE

"I need help," my father texted me from the hospital. Papá was not someone who liked asking for help. Victor Alejandro Zapana, Sr., was a war veteran and worked as a night-shift supervisor for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. In mid-March, he started having flu-like symptoms—and then his fever spiked. He began to have trouble breathing. He was tested for COVID-19 at the Brooklyn Veterans Hospital, and, three days later, the results came back positive.

On March 19th, an ambulance brought him to Elmhurst Hospital Center, in Queens. (Less than a week later, thirteen patients there died in a single day; a refrigerated truck was parked outside to handle the bodies.) My father texted me. He was sixty-one. Until he caught the virus, he was healthy.

In the nineteen-eighties, Dad immigrated to the United States from Peru. To hasten the citizenship process, he enlisted in the Army Reserves. He eventually served in South Korea, Bosnia, Kuwait, and, for four tours, Iraq. At a club in Seoul, he met my mother, an aspiring accountant, and they moved to New York. I am their only child. Dad started at the M.T.A. as a token clerk, doing back-to-back shifts at the West Fourth Street station so that Mom could stay home and raise me. Later, he worked overtime as a supervisor cleaning subway stations.

After getting my father's text, I took a car to Elmhurst to bring him a charger for his phone. Families were shut out of the hospital, to prevent further infection; we could communicate only via his cell phone. I persuaded a medical worker to bring the charger to him in the E.R. My father responded: I want some mango juice.

Dad refused to talk on the phone or try videoconferencing calls. It was too hard for him to speak. My mother, quarantined at home in Astoria, was recovering from relatively mild symptoms and living on the groceries that she and Dad had bought before either of them fell ill. Texting was our lifeline.

On March 20th, the medical team admitted Dad to a regular floor of the hospital. "I'm staying overnight looking for a room," he texted.

"No room service?" I replied. "Lame."

He LOL'ed. Later, he wrote, "I need some ceviche diablo." Ceviche is his favorite dish; he always made it for my birthday.

The texts from Elmhurst were frequent, but increasingly strained and, sometimes, garbled:

"I just wanna get better and spend whatever I ha left with u guys not here."

"I cann't sleep."

"I will wall out here." (I will walk out of here.)

"Scared working as hard as a I can to get rid of this nightmare."

On March 24th, he texted to say that he'd been given a diagnosis of pneumonia. Except for short calls asking for my father's cell-phone number, the hospital staff had not communicated with us. The next day, Dad texted that he'd elected to participate in a randomized experimental trial for the drug sarilumab. "Anything goes wrong you and mom are in charge," he wrote.

I finally reached a doctor. She told me that several attempts to help his breathing—with antibiotics, hydroxychloroquine, and water pills—had not worked. His oxygen levels were dropping, and it was getting to the point where he might need to be intubated and put on a ventilator. The doctors were moving him to a specialized floor for the more serious COVID-19 cases.

A text wasn't the right way to give Dad this news. I called him. At first, all I could hear was him coughing and wheezing. I told him about his declining oxygen levels and the possibility of a ventilator. All I could say at the end was "I love you, we love you, I love you." All he could muster was "I love you" back.

For the next thirty-two hours, Dad was silent. His lungs were a battlefield. He was too busy fighting to respond to my texts. I called the hospital repeatedly, but I got no updates. Once, I was put on hold for twenty-five minutes, and then was disconnected.

At 10:16 P.M. on March 26th, Dad wrote, "I'm to put to sleep. I love you and mom." He continued, "I'm sorry I wasn't the father. Will always love u remember that."

Then the texts stopped. I called the hospital, asking for information. I called several times the next day. A nurse or a clerk working in Dad's unit sounded testy: "They have thirty-five critical patients, and they just can't talk to everyone. They will call if there is a change in your dad's care. It is a significant change to put someone on ventilation. They would need to call the family." I asked whether he was confirming that, since no doctor had called, Dad was not on a ventilator. He said, "I can't confirm that."

I called several more times. I got nothing until 3:26 A.M. on Sunday, March 29th. A doctor called and told me that Dad had passed away at 3:18. In a restrained yet exhausted voice, he explained that the doctors had "tried everything they possibly could." He said that Dad had been put on a ventilator a few days before, and that we had been briefed on the risks of putting him on it. When I told him that no doctor had called, he said it was a "very difficult time" at the hospital. The doctors were doing their

"absolute best." By then, my heartbeat seemed louder than the doctor's voice.

I scroll through the photos of my father on my phone. I need to arrange for a veteran's funeral for him, but that may not happen for weeks, even months. I am hoping that, in Heaven, Dad has read my last text: "You were always there for me." In this life, he never had the chance to open it.

—Victor Zapana, Jr.

THE NEW DRILL
HAZARD PAY

I hate to be like this, but my commute is wonderful now. It takes me fifteen minutes to drive to work, at the Stop & Shop in Howard Beach. Normally, it's at least half an hour. This is my first day off in three weeks. I've been working in the grocery business for more than thirty years. I started as a cashier and worked my way up to bookkeeper. Grocery workers have always been treated like trash. You can go into a bank and wait on the line, and nobody will say a word. You have two people on a line in the supermarket, and holy hell breaks loose.

I'm fifty-two. I have three children. I have my little one at home. She's twenty-two. And a pit bull named Mookie. I grew up in Malverne, went to St. Agnes. I had my associate's degree in theatre. I wanted to be an actor on TV. Still do! But, you know, life happens. Waldbaum's was down the block from where I lived. That was my first job. We weren't rich. I had to pay for the car. I had to pay insurance. And then you just get caught up, and full-time came around, and I did it.

Things got busier here at the end of February, and then it just got really, really crazy. One day I'll never forget: I got in at six, and I heard a lot of noise outside. When the doors opened, they came in like banshees. Ten minutes after six, the checkout girl was on a register with her line literally down the frozen-food aisle. I went to help. It was like that supermarket show where they just throw everything into the wagon with no thinking. Water was the biggest thing. I don't understand. People were buying wagons full of water. Three hundred dollars on the self-checkouts! They were calling people from all departments to come up and bag. The empty shelves! You can't buy a can of tuna fish, there's no Chef Boyardee—things that you normally wouldn't want to buy. For two weeks, it was Thanksgiving, Christmas, and a snowstorm all together, times ten.

We didn't have gloves, we didn't have Plexiglas at that point. It was just: We gotta get the customers out. We got beaten up but we came together. These are times that none of us have ever seen, but we knew what we had to do. Now we have Plexiglas. We use only every other register. We have tape on the floor six feet apart, where people should be standing. They're trying to get us masks. In the beginning, we were not allowed to wear masks. They didn't want the customers to feel intimidated.

I wing it. To be honest, when everybody was staying home at first, I was pissed. I wanted to stay home. But then I said, "Chris, really? You have a mortgage, you have bills." I'm thankful that I have a job. I go in now at four in the morning, so I get up at ten to three. I'm exhausted. I interact with well over a hundred people each day, between employees, customers, venders. Some days, you can't hide. Yesterday was so busy, it actually aggravated me. I'm starting to think people feel immune in the store.

I have my Clorox wipes. I wipe down my keyboard, my mouse, my stapler, adding machine, the pen, any drawer that I will use with a handle, the phone, the desk—everything I touch. My hands are killing me they're so dry. I don't wear eyeliner anymore, because I'm always afraid it's gonna run and my fingers are always near my eyes.

Our union and Stop & Shop have worked together. If you do test positive, or you have to be quarantined, you'll be paid for the two weeks. It's pretty good. God forbid it goes longer than that—then you'll have to start dipping into personal time. If you leave to take care of a family member, you won't be paid. But we're getting a ten-per-cent pay increase. I guess some people call it hazard pay. Before, nobody ever, ever said thank you. When somebody says thank you now, you really know they mean it.

—Christine Merola
(as told to Zach Helfand)

SKETCHPAD BY EDWARD STEED
CORONA CUPBOARD: DAY 20

DEPT. OF SCIENCE

ATTACK MODE

Can we create antivirals to combat the next pandemic?

BY MATTHEW HUTSON

In 1981, a young man visited Cedars-Sinai hospital, in Los Angeles, with shortness of breath and with curious purplish lesions on his skin. After reviewing biopsies and scans, a twenty-eight-year-old medical resident named David Ho found an odd fungal infection in the patient's lungs and a rare cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma. These conditions were both associated with immune deficiency, though nothing in the patient's history explained why he would be in such a state. He was given antibiotics and discharged; not long after, he died. Over a few months, Ho and his colleagues saw five men with similar symptoms. They wrote up the cases and sent them to the Centers for Disease Control—the first report of what became known as AIDS.

Ho continued to explore the disease. "Some people were very concerned that I was so intrigued by those few cases at the very beginning of my career," he told me. " 'Why would you want to devote your career to an esoteric disease?' " Particularly one that seemed mainly to afflict what was considered a fringe population—gay men. But Ho, who had emigrated from Taiwan when he was twelve, speaking no English, had an underdog mentality and would not be dissuaded.

He made several discoveries throughout the nineteen-eighties about H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS, and in 1990, at the age of thirty-seven, he moved to New York to become the director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center. A year later, he received a call asking him to fly back to L.A. to test a very important patient. There, he confirmed that Earvin (Magic) Johnson was H.I.V.-positive. The following week, Johnson disclosed his condition and announced that he was retiring from the N.B.A. Ho has cared for him ever since. Johnson later said that he'd never thought AIDS would kill him, because Ho had assured him that better medicines were in the pipeline. In 1994, Ho found that a certain class of drugs could dramatically reduce the viral load in AIDS patients. But, within each infected individual, the virus evolved quickly, evading treatments. One drug was not enough. His team devised the idea of an AIDS "cocktail"—a combination of three or four drugs that, acting in concert, could corner the virus. In 1996, *Time* named Ho its Man of the Year.

In November, 2002, a novel disease broke out in China: severe acute respiratory syndrome, caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV. Ho was asked by China's top public-health officials to advise them. "The most dramatic memory I have is going to Beijing, arriving in the late afternoon or early evening, and going to the hotel along the biggest avenue," he recalled. "If you remember the Tiananmen incidents of many years ago, with the protester and the tank, that's the boulevard. It has ten or twelve lanes. There was only the car that's driving me and one ambulance for as far as one could see."

He went on, "That's when I got interested in coronaviruses, serving as a consultant and seeing the devastation firsthand in several cities throughout China." Back in New York, Ho began investigating the coronavirus family. Some coronaviruses can produce lethal diseases, like SARS; others are among the causes of the common cold. But, he said, "the SARS epidemic ended in July of 2003. By the next year, there was hardly any interest. Funding for that area kind of dried up. So we simply dropped it and went on with our H.I.V. work." In 2012, another coronavirus, MERS-CoV, caused

With each new virus, we've scrambled for a new treatment. Our approach has been "one bug, one drug."

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

an outbreak in the Arabian Peninsula; Middle East respiratory syndrome, as it was called, sickened more than twenty-five hundred people and killed more than eight hundred. Ho followed it with interest, but this outbreak, too, passed quickly. Then, this past December, a disease with similar symptoms flared up in China and, within a month, was linked to another coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. Ho told me, "My Chinese heritage caused me to focus more on the news coming out of China in late December and early January. However, the experience with SARS also put a pause on our natural reaction to jump in and get involved." His attitude shifted when the story did. "It was the growing magnitude of the outbreak that told us, 'Oh, we'd better think about getting into this,'" he said.

Ho was just setting up his lab at its new home, at Columbia University. He is friendly with Jack Ma, the founder of the e-commerce giant Alibaba, who asked how he could help. In February, Columbia announced that Ma's foundation had awarded a $2.1-million grant to Ho and several Columbia colleagues to develop antiviral drugs. This project was prompted by the COVID-19 crisis, but the mission goes beyond it; the researchers are thinking not only about the current pandemic but about future ones as well.

What will the next global pathogen be? "If you'd asked me that three or four months ago, I would have said influenza," Ho told me, with a chuckle of dismay. For scientists, this isn't just a thought experiment; it's the sort of question that shapes years of research. Two years ago, a team at Johns Hopkins issued a report titled "The Characteristics of Pandemic Pathogens," which was based on a literature review, interviews with more than a hundred and twenty experts, and a meeting devoted to the issue. It grimly considered the possibilities.

Could bacteria do us in? Outbreaks of plague have wreaked havoc throughout history, but the development of effective antibiotics in the past century "took bacteria off the table as a global biological risk for the most part," Amesh Adalja, a physician at Johns Hopkins and the report's project director, told me. Bacteria can evolve, and develop drug resistance, but usually not quickly. How about fungi? They threaten some species, but don't adapt well to warm-blooded hosts (and may have helped encourage the evolution of warm-bloodedness). Prions? These are responsible for mad-cow disease and its human variant, but are mostly avoidable by preventing food contamination and refraining from cannibalism. Protozoa? Malaria has killed perhaps half of all humans who have ever lived. But protozoa are typically transmitted by vectors such as mosquitoes and fleas, which are limited by climate and geography. Viruses, the report concluded, are the real menaces.

Not just any viruses, though. The likeliest candidates are those with a genome of RNA, which evolve faster than those with DNA. Viruses that spread before symptoms appear also have a considerable advantage. (The only infectious disease we've wiped out, smallpox, is not contagious during the incubation period.) And the most daunting are those transmitted by respiration, rather than by feces or bodily fluids, which can be controlled through sanitation. Viruses that can move between animals and humans are especially hard to manage. All in all, this character sketch gets us pretty close to identifying two classes of viral assailants: influenzas and coronaviruses.

None of our off-the-shelf treatments equip us for such a pandemic. If bacteria invade, there's a long list of antibiotics you can try. Between ciprofloxacin and amoxicillin, we can treat dozens of different types of bacterial infection. For the roughly two hundred identified viruses that afflict us, there are approved treatments for only ten or so. And the antiviral drugs that exist tend to have narrow targets. Only a few have been approved for use against more than one disease. Many drugs that work on one virus don't work on others within the same family; antivirals suited for some herpesviruses (such as the one that causes chicken pox and shingles) aren't suited for others. Some antivirals can't even treat different strains of the same virus.

And so every time a new virus appears we scramble for a new treatment. Our usual antiviral approach is, as researchers say, "one bug, one drug"; often, it's no drug. Ho has spent forty years fighting the AIDS epidemic, which has killed thirty million people and still kills nearly a million a year; he has seen three coronaviruses ambush us in the past two decades. Like many scientists, he's tired of being behind the ball. He'd like to see a penicillin for viruses—one pill, or, anyway, a mere handful—that will eliminate whatever ails us. He and his colleagues aim to have these next-generation drugs ready in time for the next pathogen. "We have to be proactive," he told me. "We must not be in a position of playing catch-up ever again."

Viruses are quite conniving for things that are not alive. A bacterium is a living cell that can survive and reproduce on its own. By contrast, a virion, or virus particle, can do nothing alone; it reproduces only by co-opting the cellular machinery of its host. Each virion consists of nothing more than a piece of DNA or RNA encased in protein, sometimes surrounded by a lipid membrane. When it gets itself sucked into a cell, it manipulates the host into building the proteins necessary for viral replication—in essence, turning it into a virus factory. Some of the proteins start to work on duplicating the virus's genome; others form a new viral coat. Those components get bundled into entirely new virions, produced by the thousands, which then pop out of the cell and make their way to other cells, within the same body or in a new one, happy to sail on the winds of a sneeze.

The fact that viruses have so few moving parts is one reason they are so hard to destroy without carpet-bombing the host organism. "They're basically evolutionarily optimized to be minimalists, so there aren't a lot of targets," David Baker, a biochemist at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, told me. The strategies employed against bacterial diseases are generally useless when it comes to viruses. Some antibiotics, including penicillin, interfere with proteins that form the cell walls of bacteria, causing the germs to burst open and die. (Viruses don't have cell walls.) Other antibiotics interfere with bacterial ribosomes—tiny intracellular structures that manufacture proteins—or mess with an enzyme crucial to a bacterium's metabolism. (Viruses have neither.) When a strain of virus does have an obvious vulnerability, there's no guarantee that another strain will share it—an obstacle for crafting generalist antivirals. And viruses tend to mutate quickly and readily acquire drug resistance, as Ho found with H.I.V.

The most valuable weapon against

viruses remains the vaccine—but vaccines (at least the kinds we've formulated so far) tend to work against only specific, identified viruses, and have to be taken before infection. Since they're not effective for everyone, moreover, we'd want antivirals for acute treatment even if we had a vaccine in hand. And fast-mutating viruses, like influenza, present a moving target, which is why, by the time a new batch of flu vaccine is manufactured every year, it's already outdated, powerless to fight much of what comes along. These limitations typically apply to antibody therapies as well: they tend to be specific to a single, already encountered virus, and can't be stockpiled for use against new ones. That's why Ho and his colleagues, like researchers elsewhere, are looking for molecular vulnerabilities in virus families, and ways to exploit them.

The earliest antivirals were discovered by means of empirical observation, and almost through happenstance. The first antiviral drug that came on the market, in the early nineteen-sixties, was a repurposed anti-cancer drug put to use as a topical treatment for a herpes infection that attacked the cornea. Another early drug, ribavirin, was developed in the nineteen-seventies, and worked against several DNA and RNA viruses, including those that cause pneumonia and hemorrhagic fever. The same decade also saw the development of acyclovir, which Ho called a "true breakthrough"; it inhibits the reproduction of a variety of herpesviruses. A series of advances came in the nineteen-eighties, in response to H.I.V. One history of antivirals, published in 1988, decried the toxicity and low efficacy of earlier drugs: "Two decades ago, antiviral therapy fell somewhere between cancer chemotherapeutic principles and folk medicine." Today, with advances in genomic analysis and computer modelling, researchers hope to find drugs that are both stronger and broader in their effects. Different researchers are targeting viruses at different points, like generals probing for weak spots along an advancing front.

One afternoon in March, I was set to visit the lab of Alejandro Chavez, a frank and fast-talking pathologist and cell biologist at Columbia who is collaborating with Ho. (Their lab buildings are kitty-corner.) A few hours before our appointment, though, I got a message: the university had barred visitors. All nonessential employees had been sent home. Ho and Chavez could carry on with their work, since they were researching SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, but I wouldn't be allowed in. When I asked if Chavez would give me a virtual tour of the lab by FaceTime, he was skeptical. "It's not gonna be that exciting, man," he warned me. "You know what biology looks like. It's like moving clear fluids from one thing to another. It's not gonna blow your mind." The lab, sparsely peopled, contained a dozen PCR machines—DNA-amplifiers, each about the size of a toaster oven—and shelves cluttered with supplies and glassware. Debbie Hong, a graduate student, was hunched over a lab bench, holding a pipette.

"It's not like the movies, with lasers and lights and, like, crazy cells in green," Chavez said as he panned his iPhone around his lab. "It's all pretty benign-looking."

Chavez's antiviral research focusses on a particular type of protein involved in viral reproduction—a scissoring enzyme known as a protease. In normal cells, ribosomes read instructions encoded in RNA and make a batch of some specified protein. When a virus like SARS-CoV-2 presents itself to a ribosome, the intruder's instructions are followed—making the particular proteins that the virus requires in order to replicate. But the ribosome delivers the batch of proteins all linked together in a long chain, a "polyprotein." So both cells and viruses then slice up these polyproteins into the smaller pieces they need. It's a little like what happens at a newspaper-printing plant, when a huge roll of paper spins through the press and then gets sliced up into individual broadsheets.

Cells and viruses both use proteases to do the slicing; for Chavez's team, the challenge is to identify new compounds that will inhibit viral proteases without interfering with a human cell's proteases. He's planning to test about sixteen thousand drugs, taken mainly from three "libraries" of compounds, many of which have already been tested for safety in humans. "If you have some information on toxicity, it's very helpful to advance the compound faster," Chavez said, referring to the process of pharmaceutical development. Each library—a case filled with thousands of chemicals—is packed in dry ice and shipped from facilities elsewhere straight to the laboratory door.

In standard "high-throughput screening," you might take a plate with three hundred and eighty-four wells, each three millimetres wide, and introduce into each well a tiny sample of the same viral protein—in this case, a particular protease—but a different drug candidate. It's as if you were testing three hundred-odd insecticides against one kind of pest. But Chavez has devised a method that lets him study more than one viral protein at a time. In each well, he will place about twenty coronavirus proteases, plus about forty proteases from H.I.V., West Nile, dengue, Zika, and so on. "I can do as many as I want," he said. "Why would I stop at coronavirus?" In effect, he's testing an array of insecticides against a menagerie of pests—aphids, weevils, Japanese beetles—at once.

The innovation came naturally to Chavez. "My background was in building new technologies," he said. "And so I was, like, 'Oh, I think I have a clever trick. Let's play around with it.'" He and Debbie Hong tried it. "We were, like, 'Holy crap, there might be something here.' And this is the opportune time to really apply it full scale." The approach could speed the identification of chemicals with broad effects—ones that work against an array of viral proteases, not just one. (The main protease used by the new coronavirus, researchers say, is similar to one used in picornaviruses, a family that includes poliovirus, the hepatitis-A virus, and the human rhinovirus.)

Chavez estimates that his multiplex project could take one or more years. "But if, at the end of that process, I could have a compound that I know works not only against the current strains but also on a lot of the future ones, that would be very useful to prevent this sort of event down the road," he said. "Because it's not a matter of *if* it's gonna happen again—it's simply a matter of *when* it's gonna happen again."

To replicate, viruses need to chop things up; they also need to glue things together. Proteases do the chopping. Another class of proteins, called polymerases, do the gluing. Interfere

OPPOSITE: MAGNUM

The photographer's wife and child, in Amman, Jordan, March 21st: "It's day two of a mandatory curfew—a violation can get you up to a year in jail—and the sun is out after a week of bad weather. Today, the government released a statement explaining the need for such extreme measures, and informing us of what to expect. It also announced that, in the past twenty-four hours, four hundred people were arrested for breaking curfew."

with the polymerases and you interfere with the assembly of the viral genome.

DNA and RNA molecules are strings of smaller molecules called nucleotides. A good way to stop polymerases from functioning, it turns out, is to supply decoy versions of these nucleotides. A virus is tricked into integrating these building blocks into its own genetic sequence. These nucleotide "analogues" are faulty parts; once they've been added to a chain of viral RNA, they effectively bring things to a halt. It's as if you'd been assembling a toy train from a pile of cars and someone slipped in a car with no hitch on the back, ending the sequence prematurely. Human cells are generally good at detecting and avoiding such defective parts; viruses are more easily duped.

One pioneer in developing such polymerase inhibitors is Mark Denison, the director of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Vanderbilt, who—remote learning being the new way of things—spent an hour and a half on the phone talking me through a PowerPoint presentation. Denison began studying viruses in 1984, working with Stanley Perlman, a microbiologist now at the University of Iowa. "I couldn't spell 'molecular biology,' I couldn't spell 'pipette,'" Denison recalled, but Perlman took a chance on him. "I didn't really understand how difficult the problem is, which is a good thing." He persisted, with his wife occasionally nudging him back to the lab. "Ultimately, I started seeing the incredible, terrible beauty of viruses, and how unique their replication patterns were and how much we had to understand about them."

Denison has been studying polymerases and nucleotide analogues for the past thirty years, and he points out that coming up with these decoys is especially challenging when dealing with coronaviruses. Unlike other viruses, coronaviruses are excellent proofreaders when it comes to reproducing their genome. Another small protein sits on top of the polymerase, checking its work as it goes down the RNA chain. "It's like an autocorrect on your phone, if it worked well," he said. Coronavirus genomes, which are about three times the size of the average RNA virus's, "are the biggest and baddest," Denison said.

Still, he figured that there was a way to elude the proofreaders. In 2012, he cold-called Gilead, a pharmaceutical company with a specialty in antivirals, asking to try its hepatitis-C drug sofosbuvir. He recounted, "They said, 'Well, no, you can't. That's our multi-billion-dollar drug. We don't know you.'" But they were open to collaboration, and sent Denison's lab a selection of other compounds. Denison and his team got to work testing them on a coronavirus called mouse-hepatitis virus, which is safe to work with because it doesn't infect people. "To our shock, basically, the very first one we tried had activity against our model virus," he told me. "And I thought we made a mistake, and then it worked again. So I wrote them back and said, 'Umm, this looks like it works.' They said, 'Here's sixty chemical modifications of that same drug.' So we tested all sixty, and every single one was more active than the original compound. But one of them was *really* good. And they said, 'Well, then, here's the one we want you to work with.'" It turned out that this drug, called remdesivir, had been developed, without notable success, for use against Ebola.

This research helped Denison and his longtime collaborator Ralph Baric, a virologist at the University of North Carolina, land a large N.I.H. grant, in 2014, to study coronavirus drugs. Denison and Baric have been particularly excited about a small-molecule drug known as NHC. (It's technically a nucleoside analogue—nucleosides lack the phosphorus group that nucleotides have.) This one also sneaks into a growing RNA chain, but, instead of halting construction immediately, it introduces mutations in subsequent copies. Denison says that NHC checks all the boxes: it inhibits multiple coronaviruses (including SARS-CoV-2), has a high barrier to resistance, and protects mice that have been given the drug even before infection. Unlike remdesivir, which has to be infused intravenously, it can be taken orally, as a pill—an easier and cheaper way of administering a drug. (To be sure, neither NHC nor remde-

AFTER SEX, CHECKING FOR INSTAGRAM POSTS BY MY KIDS, AND OTHER AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

I lay awake reviewing the math.
Trump had said there were just 15
cases in the country. There were 64 then,
but only for an hour or two. I was wondering

about the numbers we can't know:
at this moment there's a secret true number
of people actually carrying coronavirus,
the same way there is a number

of living blades of grass on earth right now.
We understand we can't count them,
but we can agree there exists
an exact quantity, counted or not.

Scientists of the plains and meadows,
of our city greens and suburban lawns,
of our mowing and grazing patterns,
could model a fair estimate, I believe.

Sex is one way to count sheep,
and when I rose from bed I asked you
What will happen to funerals
and rituals for burying the dead

if there's really a pandemic
and people can't gather
in numbers? You were drifting off.
I remembered how I'd lie awake

when we were trying to have children
and freeze myself in a pelvic scoop
or with legs in the air like a flipped insect
for long minutes after the fact and not get up

all night so none of the seeds
would "fall out"—
as if to let leak by even a jot
would lower the odds, though I knew

in each teaspoon 20 to 40 million might press
their luck. Back then, as I noted
that trying to make life was comical
(and hatched new strains

of insomnia), I reasoned
into the darkness that respectfully
not jostling them all
might yield me the one.

—Deborah Garrison

sivir has yet been shown to work in clinical trials.)

"Most people do extensive testing on one drug, then see if it works more broadly," Denison said. "We took the opposite approach, which was: we don't even want to work with a compound unless it works against every coronavirus we test, because we aren't even worried about SARS and MERS as much as we are about the one that we don't know about that's going to come along."

The usual goal with antivirals is to interfere with the virus, not the host. But some researchers have taken a seemingly counterintuitive approach, seeking to change the host environment in a way that makes it less congenial to viruses. With "host-targeted antivirals," the aim is to disrupt certain processes in the human cells which are used for viral replication but—with luck—not for much else. Shirit Einav, a Stanford virologist who completed medical school in Israel before doing a residency in Boston, is one enthusiast of this strategy. Frustrated that some of her hepatitis-C patients were beyond the help of available treatments, she turned to research, spending five years looking for a way to target hepatitis C and studying a drug that looked promising. She became discouraged when she realized how narrow-bore it was. It worked against one strain of the virus but proved useless against others, and resistance to it quickly developed. "In the end, I realized how limited the scalability of this approach is," she said. "That was actually how I then transitioned to the host-targeted approach."

Host-targeted drugs, she believes, could have a broader application than other antiviral drugs. No matter which specific virus invades them, human cells have the same basic machinery. The challenge is typically to find a dosage high enough to bother the virus but not so high that it harms the host. It helps that our cells feature redundancy: if you interfere with one cellular protein that viruses depend on, the cell often has a backup for itself.

Where Chavez and Denison are targeting viral proteins, then, Einav focusses on host proteins—in particular, a class of enzymes that are co-opted by viruses to shuttle themselves inside invaded cells. A few years ago, she discovered two cellular enzymes required for viral infection and found that, in mice, two drugs that impair these enzymes reduced dengue and Ebola viral loads. In lab-grown cell cultures, they slowed the replication not only of dengue but also of other pathogens in the Flaviviridae family, such as West Nile and Zika. Einav's collaborators are now testing these drugs on the new coronavirus. She's hopeful, given that they've also shown promise against the virus that causes SARS. But she notes that they didn't work for DNA viruses. An infinitely broad-spectrum antiviral, she acknowledged, may be out of the question: "I don't think it's one for all, but it might be one for many."

Other host-directed drugs are being tested for use against SARS-CoV-2. A pancreatitis drug, camostat mesylate, inhibits a cellular enzyme that helps some viruses dock with cells, and was shown last month to work against the new coronavirus, at least in cell cultures. And, because the same enzyme is enlisted by other coronaviruses, like the ones that cause SARS and MERS, there's hope that the drug might be effective against a range of these viruses. Chavez told me that if Einav's compounds work in patients—always a big if—"I think it could be a jackpot. These are all interesting ideas. I think you really want a multipronged approach."

At a moment like this, the urgency of such research is self-evident. But the market has not encouraged the development of drugs for use in acute infections. The big investment has been in drugs for chronic viral diseases, such as AIDS and hepatitis B. "If you start looking at acute viral infections"—which hit suddenly and kill you or pass on through—"it's pretty gloomy," Einav said of the financial prospects that pharmaceutical companies see. David Baker, of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, noted that, although cancer drugs are also expensive to develop and bring to market, "there will always be people dying

of cancer." But pandemics arrive infrequently and don't necessarily stay for long—characteristics that make them a commercial liability. "It's one of those cases where a traditional market economy doesn't work so well," Adalja, of Johns Hopkins, said. "Suppose you made a SARS antiviral in 2003," after its 2002-03 run. "You would not have had a return on investment, because SARS was gone."

In 2014, Timothy Sheahan, a microbiologist now at the University of North Carolina and a collaborator of Denison's, joined a group at GlaxoSmithKline working on broad-spectrum antivirals for respiratory infections. A year later, the project was shut down. "I gained insight into how pharma works and how hard it is to develop drugs that not only work but are safe," he said. (He noted that many drugs that seem safe in animal models prove otherwise in human trials.) "Twenty years ago, most if not all Big Pharma companies probably had some antiviral-drug program. Now there aren't many." Jason McLellan, a molecular biologist at the University of Texas at Austin, pointed out that, of the six human coronaviruses known before the Wuhan outbreak, the two that caused SARS and MERS killed only a few thousand people combined, and the four others cause a common cold. "I'm not sure you can fault companies for not doing a bunch of drug development on coronavirus," he said. Denison's sense of the need for basic, noncommercial research makes him voluble in his gratitude to the N.I.H. "They've supported me doing this work for about thirty years," he said. "And so I think this demonstrates the critical importance of doing fundamental research on every known human-virus family and understanding their mechanisms and their unique targets, because you just don't know which family it's going to come out of next." All these researchers agreed on the importance of developing multiple broad-spectrum antivirals; all recognized that the private sector was unlikely to be a mainstay of support.

Last month, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Wellcome, and Mastercard pledged a hundred and twenty-five million dollars to the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator to help researchers, regulators, and manufacturers overcome some of the market impediments to drug development. Creating a new antiviral will cost much more than that, but funding from foundations, along with public institutions, can ease certain pain points—for instance, by making it possible to solicit compounds for a pandemic-drug library of candidates for screening. I asked Trevor Mundel, the Gates Foundation's president of global health, how we might prepare for the next global contagion. Let's say we had a drug that worked against a broad spectrum of coronaviruses, and maybe other viruses, too. Would we manufacture and stockpile billions of doses, just in case? Who would pay for that? He said that, if drugs with clear broad-spectrum potential came along, governments likely wouldn't need much convincing. At a minimum, countries might make tens of millions of doses available for health-care workers and other critical employees. But in the absence of truly broad-spectrum antivirals we might need twenty drugs that act on different components of infection. Then we'd need to stockpile all twenty.

Mundel, a former pharmaceutical executive trained in mathematics, highlighted two basic challenges when it comes to preparing antivirals for pandemics. "One rate-limiting factor is manufacturing. People find that a boring subject, but if you don't get manufacturing right you can end up with nothing," he said. "The other thing that is, of course, rate-limiting is clinical studies. And you saw how chaotic that can be with Ebola, and initially in China"—he was referring to the COVID-19 pandemic. "There were a lot of studies being done that were not well designed or controlled. And we start to see that in other places as well: everybody's jumping in with an observational study."

A better platform for doing clinical studies would insure better data, but geography stands in the way. Because pandemics move fluidly across borders, ongoing studies like Gilead's remdesivir trials in China risk running short on patients if an outbreak is contained in one location while flaring elsewhere. "You've got to have a global clinical study where you can shift around where you're getting patients from," Mundel told me. "And nobody has ever had that kind of clinical study that's been global and could pull from different geographies as things pop up. So that's what we're trying to put in place." Meanwhile, the World Health Organization has launched a multi-arm trial across many countries, with room to add more arms and countries. It's called the Solidarity Trial.

On my call with David Ho, he led me on a FaceTime tour of his spartan office and sprawling lab spaces. Hanging in an atrium was a two-story tapestry depicting a double helix, which he's had for twenty-five years. It was made by a man who helped design Ho's previous lab space and who later died of AIDS. Down a hallway, Ho pointed through a window to a high-containment facility with PCR machines, centrifuges, incubators, and microscopes. Venturing inside this area requires head-to-toe protective gear.

Another room housed the lab's most expensive machines, including one that makes cells fluoresce and one with a sign warning "CAUTION LASER IN USE." (Chavez's disclaimer notwithstanding, green cells and lasers aren't just for movies.) The main lab was big and open, with the capacity for seventy-five researchers. That day, it was nearly empty. The "nonessential" people who had been sent home included AIDS researchers.

As he walked back to his office, the deserted corridors reminded me of Ho's description of the empty boulevard in Beijing. Now at his desk, Ho reflected on negligence and hubris. "We as a society dropped the ball after SARS," he said. "Just because the virus went away, we naïvely thought, Well, you know, goodbye, coronaviruses." There's no reason, Ho said, to think that it will ever be possible to bid such a farewell: "This is the third coronavirus outbreak in two decades." There is, undoubtedly, a fourth somewhere on the horizon, if a different RNA virus doesn't encircle the world first. There is no way to predict what disease it will cause—it won't be SARS, or MERS, or COVID-19—but certain things will be the same. Masks will come out, streets will empty, fear will take hold. One thing might be different, if Ho and others like him have their way: there might be a therapeutic arsenal already in place.

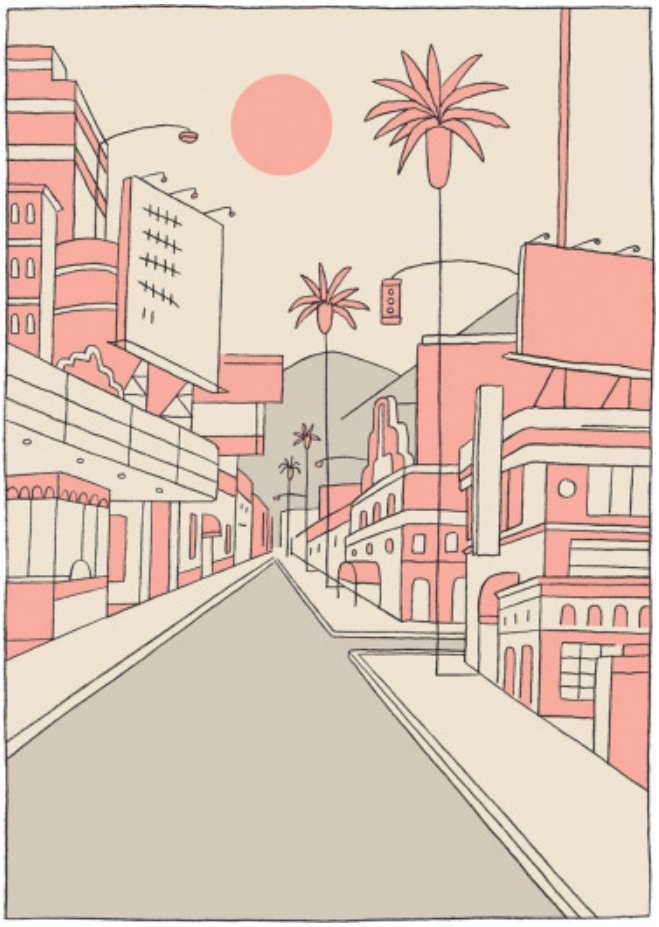
"This one is teaching us the lesson that we should persist and come up with permanent solutions," he said. "We need to persist until we find a broader solution. An outbreak due to this virus or some other viruses will surely come back." ♦

LETTER FROM LOS ANGELES

HOME ALONE TOGETHER

Shared isolation is the new solidarity.

BY GEOFF DYER



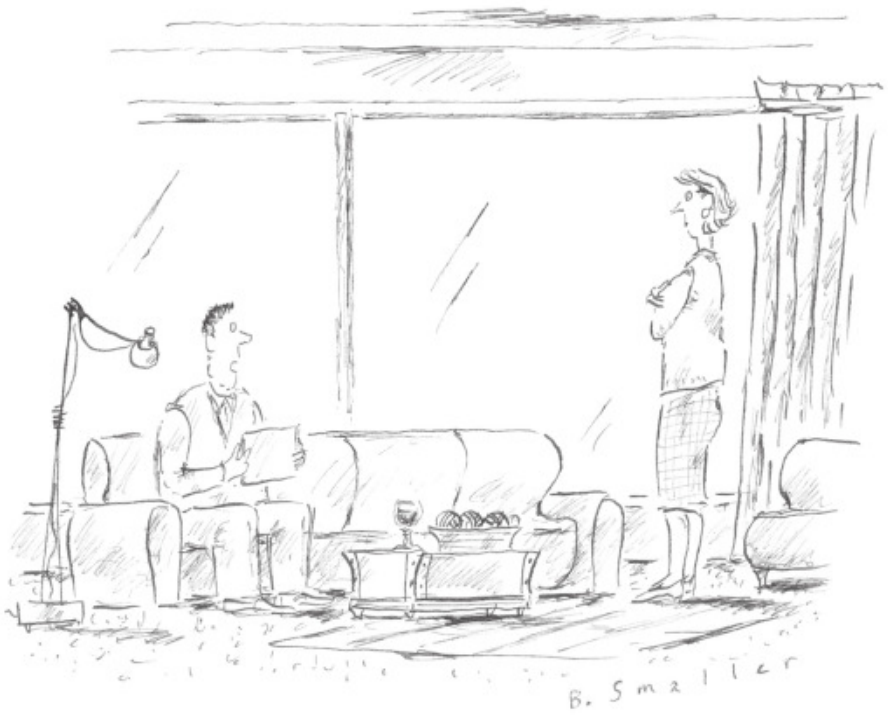
After everything changed, suddenly and unexpectedly, in New York on September 11, 2001, evidence of catastrophe was there for everyone—for all the world—to see. The damage was both a horrible reminder of what had happened and a portent of what might be still to come. Today, even in some of the cities most afflicted by the coronavirus pandemic, there is no physical devastation, while death and illness, though widespread, occur invisibly, behind closed doors. Photographs in newspapers show workers in hazmat suits disinfecting the streets, but few of us have witnessed such scenes for ourselves. The evidence of the calamity is overwhelmingly of absence, of empty streets and tourist spots. As previously glimpsed in filmic depictions of a post-apocalyptic world, aspects of this scenario have an idyllic quality: streets devoid of traffic and crowds.

In Southern California, with its gorgeous sky and sea, the beaches have been quieter than usual since the beachside parking lots were closed, but people have been allowed to jog or do yoga as long as they maintain a suitable distance from one another. And yet. Having topped up their already top-of-the-range immune systems with cold-pressed juices and boosts, the same people who were energetically maintaining the perfection of their perfect bodies—bodies capable of bench-pressing enormous weights and running from Malibu to Santa Monica—might suddenly, for no visible reason, find themselves incapable even of breathing. (I spoke too soon; on March 27th, it was announced that all beaches would be closed through April 19th. So now the beaches, too, are full only of absence.)

Shaped by a threat that is at once invisible and implacable, the necessary unity and solidarity must lack all the excitement traditionally associated with people coming together in common cause for events such as the March on Washington, in 1963, or Woodstock—or, going farther back, the outbreak of the American Civil War, when one excited bystander observed, "The whole population, men, women, and children, seem to be in the streets." This fusion of the festive and the martial was beautifully expressed by the poet Philip Larkin in his famous description of the crowds of men who, in 1914, lined up to enlist, "as if it were all/An August Bank Holiday lark." Despite invocations of the Blitz spirit and the mobilization of wartime rhetoric, there is not even an enemy now—because the person most likely to harm you will be your friend, neighbor, lover, parent, or child. So there is none of the collective fever of purpose and determination—or, at least, that fever must be experienced in isolation. Lovely things like the applause for health-care workers are attempts not only to make visible and audible our appreciation but also to share our isolation. The times they are a-changing, with stunning rapidity, but Dylan's rousing exhortation has now to be completely reversed: *Don't* gather 'round people . . .

The required form of isolated solidarity is, weirdly, both in synch and at odds with what, for the past decade or so, has seemed an increasingly solipsistic withdrawal, whereby, even as people appear physically to be on the streets, they're psychically disappearing into their phones. Now we're on our phones at home as a way of being on the street, kicking ourselves for all those hours wasted outside, looking at screens when we could have been looking at one another. As a collective act, we are encouraged to retreat deeper into the burrow of phone-life to allow maximum freedom and minimum risk for those who have actual physical and essential tasks to perform. The best we can do is disappear into the great indoors: an unprecedented inversion of everything that has constituted solidarity, and one requiring

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN REA



"How can you say I don't give back? I'm on the co-op board."

• •

a more widespread commitment—to support more extensive international coöperation—than has ever been seen.

Our solidarity also requires that we get away from passively wishing "they" would do something. Of course, there are many things that only the government can provide and do, but we have a part to play, mainly by not doing things—at the very least, not going out, not buying stuff we don't need, not going to the hospital unless we have to. In Britain, the response to the National Health Service's request for volunteers shows how desperate and ready people are to convert energetic passivity into agency. I propose—subject to scientific and governmental approval—that, for those who get the virus, recover, and are given the all-clear, T-shirts be made available, saying something like "I've had it, I'm over it—and I'm ready to help." The appetite to help is matched by a longing for a renewed and properly inclusive sense of community to move beyond the variously circled wagons of identity politics. Many times in the past week, I've thought of something said by Larry Harvey, the co-founder of Burning Man, about the experience of building a temporary city in the inhospitable desert: "Communities are not produced by sentiment or mere good will. They grow out of a shared struggle."

Part of this struggle, for us now, is to carry on with a reduced version of normal life at a time when everything non-COVID-related seems so pointless. Last week, I wrote to a student about an overdue essay, conscious, even as I did so, that, in the larger scheme of things—at a time when, for example, Liverpool seemed destined to be denied an English Premier League title it had all but won—this counted almost for nothing. As, in a still larger context, does the idea of Liverpool winning the Premiership, or even the existence of the Premiership, or of sports generally. But in some contexts everything counts almost for nothing. We routinely say of a setback, "It's not the end of the world." Well, of course it's not. Even the end of the world as we know it turns out not to be the end of the world. So, to downgrade Fitzgerald's rhapsodic claim at the end of "The Great Gatsby," we plod on—or don't stop plodding on—for the simple reason that, with few exceptions, we are programmed to keep putting one foot in front of the other. That's what feet are for.

On the home front, a ploddable rhythm had been established whereby my wife panicked and I calmed her down and then we switched roles at various times throughout the day, until, just before sleeping, as a kind of surrogate for sex, we got in a panic together. In the bathroom one night, she unleashed a brief scare-surge by wondering whether flossing our teeth, with all the hand-in-mouth action it involves, was just about the most stupid thing to be doing right now. But if we stop flossing doesn't that mean the virus has won? The lesson of the Alamo, surely, was that they flossed to the last man. I'm going out on my mint-waxed shield, I decided, and went right back at it. Each of us felt constantly on the verge of coming down with something that could only be one thing: bow waves of impending malaise, pre-headaches within the larger angst-induced perma-headache, dry throats tingling on the brink of becoming sore. Then, a couple of weeks ago, my wife started feeling strange, or "quivery," as she put it. Quivery turned briefly into feverish before subsiding into complete exhaustion and an increasing tightness in the chest. Over the next several days, the feeling of being completely exhausted changed, though this hardly seemed possible, into even more complete—even deeper—exhaustion. There was hardly any coughing and no shortness of breath: both good signs, according to the doctor she spoke with, but her symptoms certainly fell within the broad spectrum of COVID-19. Here in Los Angeles, there was only a dim hope of getting that suspicion verified by a test. The criteria to be met were so stringent that a test seemed all but indistinguishable from a postmortem. Since we've been keeping entirely to ourselves, the most reliable way of finding out if she has it is to see if I get it. So *I* am the test. I am the canary and our home is the coal mine.

The "alienation" that residents of L.A. naturally suffer from—as a result of the immense sprawl—means that social distancing is built into the fabric of the city. But that's of little help once the idea of distancing gets internalized, moves in and takes up residence like an uninvited house guest whose stay is of unspecified duration—and, in a worst-case scenario, could be for the rest of our lives. Replicating the global strategy, we are trying to flatten the curve in our apartment,

hopefully extending the interval between infections so that my wife recovers from hers before I show symptoms of mine. In the meantime, it's important for me to be tender and cool in equal measure. Musically, the master of this combination was Miles Davis, and so, on the rare occasions that she ventures from her bed, I express my affection in suitably Davisian style: "Keep your distance, motherfucker."

I've always done the cleaning in our place, and the new need for enhanced hygiene means that I am now cleaning all the time that I'm not cooking and caring: a limited life that is also quite fulfilling. There are other ambiguous positives, too. I liked the way the virus put an end to the hug as greeting, something that I started doing after moving to California even though I always felt that everyone could tell I was just going through the motions. But now there's no one to greet. Still, it's good that the recent meaning of "cancelled" has sort of cancelled itself out. For a while, it was an opinion or a demand elevated to the level of fiat about someone who had given offense of some kind: part of a cultural movement, a cumulative total of grievance. Now it once again refers to something that has had to be called off, to unanimous disappointment and the satisfaction of no one. The cancellation of the Big Ears music festival and, recently, of Wimbledon hit me hard. These are events I was looking forward to. Now there is nothing to look forward to except being able to leave the house and not fretting constantly if my wife is getting sicker or I am starting to get sick. Normally, a cancellation is a source of personal affront, but now that everything has been cancelled everywhere it has become part of the general condition of existence. That's what happened during the First World War, when, after worrying that they might miss out on the fighting—because it would all be over by Christmas—people settled into the feeling that it might never end. The proposed end dates of the current lockdowns and closures are pretty arbitrary in practical terms, but they serve the useful function of making life seem manageable. The alternative—everything shut everywhere for the foreseeable future—would make us feel like we had fallen out of time (at a time when it's already difficult to remember which day of the week it is, when the main way of distinguishing one day from the next is the mounting toll of deaths in whichever city has assumed the unwelcome distinction of becoming the latest viral hot spot).

On a larger scale, the fact that men may be at a higher risk of fatal infection is perhaps another sign that we might be living—or, more accurately, dying—through an eagerly anticipated phenomenon, the end of patriarchy. Like any reasonable man, I was rather looking forward to this but am now worried by two things: the vexed political chestnut of whether the ends justify the means, and whether I'll be around to see it. Meanwhile, that throbbing embodiment of patriarchy, Donald Trump, is emerging from the pandemic with his reputation considerably enhanced. The old accusations—that he is a misogynist, a racist, and so forth—now appear parochial and narrowly partisan. They may not have been laid to rest, but they should, at least temporarily, be set aside while a sense of his true stature becomes clear: as the enemy of all the American people. Having made that claim, I feel the need immediately to qualify it, since Trump remains a true friend of the terminally poor: those so reduced in spirit that their only way to measure the value of life is by the single-minded accumulation of wealth.

Oh, but here's another late-breaking bit of news. After a week of almost motionless sickness, my wife discovered that she could get tested. Driving us up to the edge of Brentwood on the 405, I was filled with a sense of purposeful adventure—we had left the house!—that she felt too ravaged to share. A journey that might normally have taken ninety nerve-shredding minutes took less than twenty. If only L.A. were always like this! Then things took an ominous turn. Following directions from Google, we found ourselves in the Los Angeles National Cemetery, a vast and beautiful expanse of white headstones and emerald grass that made it seem as if that earlier crack about the elision of test and postmortem had become an actuality. We had made a navigational error, but only a slight one: the drive-through testing site was just a couple of minutes from the cemetery.

And there it was, our first real sight of the new and hitherto invisible apocalypse: hazmat suits, police, barricades. But still the main impression was of absence. We had expected to be in a long convoy of congealed traffic, but there were just three cars ahead of us. It was as if we had turned up for an outdoor concert so far ahead of time that only the security had arrived.

In California, one's interactions with people tend to be every bit as pleasant as the weather, and so it proved here. I had read that you were meant to wear a mask to the testing site, but mine (part of a packet sent by a friend in China) broke as I put it on, so it dangled pointlessly from one ear as we drove up to the check-in area. "Your outfit is almost as good as mine," a person in a white hazmat suit and shaded goggles said. The voice saying this was a woman's. Deeply hidden, there it was, the voice of the opposite sex, with all the mystery and wonder that entails. In the midst of a situation demanding military efficiency, there was room, still, for charm. She checked us in, asked us to close all the windows except mine, which was to be kept open only five inches. We moved up to another hazmat suit, who, having handed over a test-kit box, told me to wind my window all the way up so that we were securely locked within our own potential contagion. I wished so badly that my mask had not broken that my instinct was to ask my wife if I could borrow hers.

We moved on, put the car in Park, and scrutinized the kit's simple instructions as if our lives depended on them. My wife swabbed her mouth and sealed the test stick in a tube—not as simple as it sounds: the stick was too long and had to be broken on the edge of the tube, but it was yoga-ishly bendy rather than brittle—before sealing the tube in a plastic bag, which she then sealed in a bubble-wrap bag before returning it to the box. We crawled forward, broke the seal on the window, and tossed the box into a blue bin indicated by a final hazmat-suited sentinel, who waved us on. We drove out past the huge and patient cemetery. All the time in the world, it seemed, resided there. The sky was its usual expectant blue. ♦

ANNALS OF GASTRONOMY

GOOD BREAD

For a newcomer to Lyon, a bakery apprenticeship reveals a way of life.

BY BILL BUFORD

The bread from Bob's boulangerie united a neighborhood of food fanatics.

In Lyon, an ancient but benevolent law compels bakers to take one day off a week, and so most don't work Sundays. An exception was the one in the quartier where I lived with my family for five years, until 2013. On Sundays, the baker, Bob, worked without sleep. Late-night carousers started appearing at three in the morning to ask for a hot baguette, swaying on tiptoe at a high ventilation window by the oven room, a hand outstretched with a euro coin. By nine, a line extended down the street, and the shop, when you finally got inside, was loud from people and from music being played at high volume. Everyone shouted to be heard—the cacophonous hustle, oven doors banging, people waving and trying to get noticed, too-hot-to-touch baguettes arriving in baskets, money changing hands. Everyone left with an armful and with the same look, suspended between appetite and the prospect of an appetite satisfied. It was a lesson in the appeal of good bread—handmade, aromatically yeasty, with a just-out-of-the-oven texture of crunchy air. This was their breakfast. It completed the week. This was Sunday in Lyon.

For most of my adult life, I had secretly wanted to find myself in France: in a French kitchen, somehow holding my own, having been "French-trained" (the enduring magic of that phrase). I thought of Lyon, rather than Paris or Provence, because it was said to be the most Frenchly authentic and was known historically as the world's gastronomic capital. Daniel Boulud, the most successful serious French chef in the United States, was from there, as was Paul Bocuse, the most celebrated chef in the world. The restaurateur Jean-Georges Vongerichten had trained in Bocuse's kitchen, as his sauce-maker. "Lyon is a wonderful city," he told me. "It is where it all started. You really should go."

Why not? My wife, Jessica Green, a wine educator and lecturer, lived for the next chance to pack her bags. (She also spoke fluent French, which I did not.) And our twin boys, George and Frederick, were three years old—possibly the perfect age to move to a new country. Our landing, though, was surprisingly rough. Lyon seemed unwelcoming, suspicious of outsiders, and indifferently itself. "Our town is not easy to love," a Lyonnais novelist had written in the thirties (the Fascist Henri Béraud, who was also not so easy to love). "It is an acquired taste. Almost a vice."

We got an apartment by the River Saône, situated auspiciously on the Quai Saint-Vincent. (Vincent was the patron saint of winemakers.) A gnarly first-century aqueduct column by a post office reminded us that the Romans had been here. In entryways, I found stone stairs rendered concave by boot traffic. Farther up the quai was a former monastery courtyard, overgrown but graceful. In our quartier, there were workshops, not shops: a bookbinder, a violin-repair person, a seamstress, a guitar-maker, a one-room pastry "factory." The next street over, Arabic was the principal language, and women, their heads covered, fetched water by bucket from an archaic faucet.

There was also—on the nearby Place Sathonay—a porn shop, park benches occupied by drunks, drug deals, graffiti on most surfaces, dog shit everywhere. At a playground, sparkly with bits of broken glass, we watched small children hitting one another. And yet the quartier, for all its in-your-face grittiness, also had energy and integrity and an abundance of small eateries. The food wasn't grand, but it was always honest, characterized by *bon rapport qualité-prix*—good quality for the price, an essential feature of the Lyonnais meal. Our apart-

ILLUSTRATION BY LEO ESPINOSA

ment was opposite a mural called "La Fresque des Lyonnais," two millennia of the city's famous citizens painted onto a six-story windowless wall. The same building housed Bob's boulangerie, where, friends told us, you could find the best bread in the city.

The boulangerie was where the boys discovered the word *goûter* (from *goût*, meaning "flavor," and probably the single most important word in the entire language). A *goûter* is an afternoon snack—eaten universally at 4 P.M., when children get out of school—and an exception to two of the city's implicit rules about food: you do not eat standing up, and you never eat between meals. A *goûter* is devoured instantly. The boys discovered Bob's *pain au chocolat* and didn't understand why they should eat anything else.

They also discovered Bob's baguettes, which Frederick developed a practice of assaulting each morning before eating: breaking one open with his hands, sticking his nose inside, inhaling, and then smiling. On Wednesdays, when Bob was closed and we bought baguettes elsewhere, Frederick subjected them to his test and, without fail, found them inedible. (Bob was thrilled by Frederick's findings.) Bob's bread had aromatic complexity and was long in flavor in ways that we'd never known before. We were at his boulangerie every day. Some days, we went three times, which concerned him: "You've had enough bread today. Go home!"

We had been in Lyon a month when the evidence was inescapable: I couldn't find a restaurant to take me on. I had cooking experience, but it was mainly Italian, and Italian, I was discovering, didn't count. I was at home pacing (panicking, frankly), when I declared to Jessica, "I'm going to work for Bob. In fact, I'm going to walk over there now and present myself."

It was eight in the evening, but I was pretty sure he'd be there. Bob was known for his extreme hours, his light on in the back when the rest of the quartier was dark. And he *was* there, but he was heading home for a nap.

Bob knew why I was in Lyon. He also knew that I hadn't found a kitchen to work in. So, when I made my proposal, straight out—"Bob, I've decided, on reflection, that I should start with you, in your boulangerie"—he knew that he was my backup: that, in effect, I was lying.

"No," he said.

"No?" I pressed. "Bob, you make the best bread in the city. I want to learn why."

His gaze drifted above my head. He seemed to be imagining what it might be like for me to work there.

Bob was forty-four. He was jowly and wide of girth and, when unshaven, looked something like a genetic intermarriage of Fred Flintstone and Jackie Gleason. His hair was brownish and shaggy and usually matted with flour. There was flour in his beard and on his clogs, his sweater, and his trousers. (He wore an apron, but it didn't help.) Bathing was not a priority. He slept when he could, and seemed to live by an internal clock set to an alarm that was always going off—yeast, dough-making, the unforgiving speed of a hot oven. He knew that his bread was exceptionally good, but he did not see himself as a genius. In a city of food fanatics, he was just a baker. He was, in fact, just Bob. And he wasn't even that. His real name was Yves. (No one knew why he went by Bob. I once asked him, and he was vague: "Somebody, a long time ago . . .")

"Yes," he said slowly: *Oui-i-i-i*. He actually seemed to be getting excited. I could see excitement in his fingers. They were drumming a counter. "Come. Work here. You will be welcome."

"I will see you tomorrow." I thanked him. We shook hands. I made to leave.

"You live across the street, right? You can stop by anytime. If you can't sleep, come over. At three in the morning, I'll be here."

I thought, If I can't sleep at three in the morning, I don't go for walks. But I understood the message. Bob was making himself available. I'll be your friend, he was saying.

At three on a weekday morning, when I set out for my first training, the city was lonely. The river was cold-making to look at and thick like motor oil when a barge appeared (suddenly, unexpectedly) a few feet away. From Thursday to Sunday, Lyon was all-night drinking, loud music, car burnings, vandalism, vomiting. Now there were no vehicles, no people, not a light on in any apartment.

Bob was clearly waiting for me. He ripped open a fifty-kilo sack of flour, lifted it without a sign of strain, and emptied it into a large steel basin. He grabbed a milk carton with the top cut off and told me to follow him to a sink—a startling sight, filled with coffee paraphernalia, grounds everywhere, a sandwich floating in something black, a wet roll of toilet paper. He negotiated the carton to a position under the faucet and ran it hot.

"You arrive at the correct temperature by a formula involving two other factors," Bob explained. "One is the temperature of the air. This morning, it is cold—it is probably two degrees. The other is the flour—"

"How do you know that?"

"It's the temperature of the air."

"Of course."

"These two factors added together, plus the water, should equal fifty-four degrees Celsius." So if the air was two degrees, and the flour was two degrees, the water would have to be fifty.

"Hot," I said.

"Exactly."

The water from the tap was steaming. Bob filled the carton.

I asked, "Bob, you don't use a thermometer?"

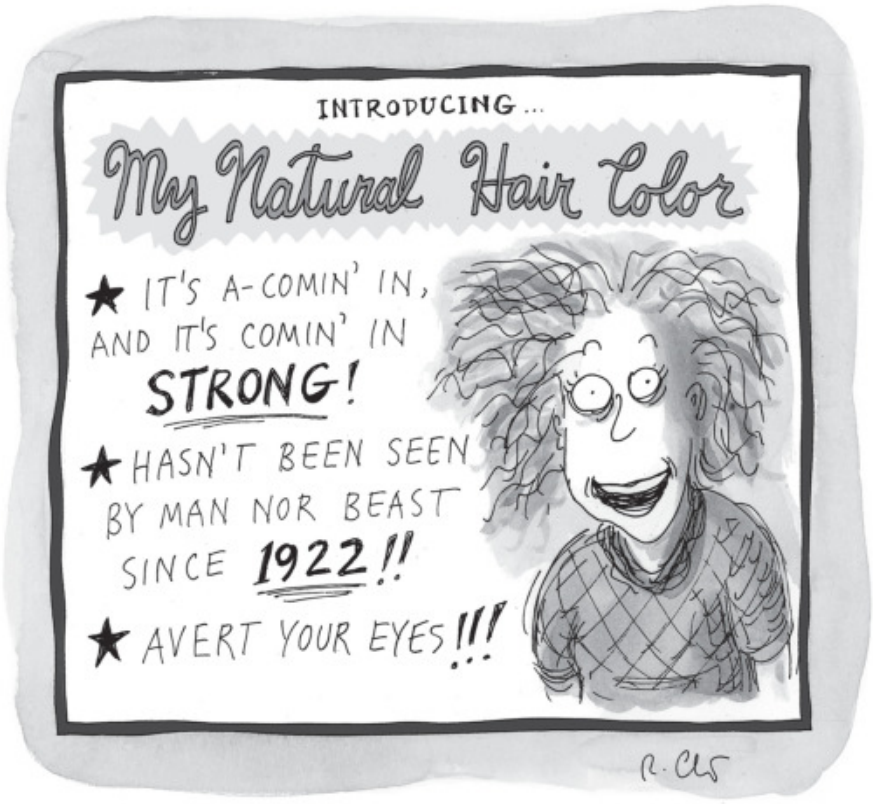
"No."

"Do you own a thermometer?"

"No." He considered. "You know, I might."

Bob poured the water into the basin and started an apparatus attached at the top, a kneader. It appeared to have originally operated by turning a crank, and at some point had been upgraded with a washing-machine motor. Two hooks, looking like prosthetic hands, scooped up the dough very slowly. "It is no faster than if you did this with your own hands," he said.

"Then we take some of last night's dough." *La vieille pâte*. It was brown and cakey, wrapped in plastic film. He pinched a bit between his thumb and forefinger and tossed it into the basin. He took a second pinch, scrutinized it, thought better of the quantity, and tossed in half. This, in effect, was his "starter," yeasts still alive from last night that would be woken up in the new batch. It wasn't the only source. I knew enough about yeasts to know that, here, they were everywhere. You could peel


INTRODUCING ...
My Natural Hair Color
★ IT'S A-COMIN' IN, AND IT'S COMIN' IN STRONG!
★ HASN'T BEEN SEEN BY MAN NOR BEAST SINCE 1922!!
★ AVERT YOUR EYES!!!

• • •

them off the walls. You could scrape all you needed from underneath Bob's fingernails.

I looked around. On every available surface, there was an unwashed coffee mug. Fabric *couches*, used for shaping baguettes, were draped across wooden poles, like beach towels still damp from last summer. A light bulb dangled from the ceiling. There were the flickering blue lights of the ovens. The darkness put you on your guard. You could trip here and die.

He stopped the kneader and tore off a piece of dough. It was thin and elastic. "You can see through it," he said, laughing as he stretched it across my face like a mask.

Tonight's dough would be ready the next afternoon. The morning's baguettes would be made, therefore, from last night's.

"Let's get breakfast," Bob said.

An off-track-betting bar opened at six. The coffee was filthy, the bread was stale, and the clientele might be flatteringly described as "rough" (phlegmatic one-lunged hackers knocking back sunrise brandies, while studying the racing odds), but, for Bob, they represented companionship. He was at ease among them. He introduced me as the guy he was training to make bread, his way.

Bob had not set out to be a baker. In his twenties, he worked in a law library in Paris, a job that he loved. His father had been a baker. His older brother Philippe was a great one, who had already opened three bakeries, as well as doing stints at ski resorts in the winter and in the Caribbean during the spring.

It was Jacques, another brother, who discovered, by accident, the boulangerie on the Saône. He had come upon a space for rent, situated in front of a footbridge, but it was filthy and filled with trash. He investigated: two floors, thick stone walls, a worn stone staircase, and, in the back, an old wood-burning oven. He wiped off the soot. It said 1802. He became excited—the river, the history ("La Fresque des Lyonnais" was then being painted on the back wall)—and summoned his father, Philippe, and Bob. "My father looked at the property from the outside and said, 'Yes, this is a good boulangerie,'" Bob told me. "'Bread has been made here for a long time.'" The family bought the boulangerie, for what was then about eleven thousand dollars, and got it ready. (It was probably—I couldn't keep myself from thinking—the last time the floors were cleaned.)

Bob returned to Paris, and a sign went up: "Philippe Richard Artisan Boulanger." But it seems unlikely that Philippe intended to remain. He had a family and a business in Nantes, eight hours away. He called Bob: Quit your job, he said, and come run the boulangerie with me. In effect, he was beginning Bob's training (what in French is called a *formation*), helping him find his calling. "Without Philippe," Bob said, "I would be nothing." After a time—six months? A year? Bob couldn't remember—Philippe announced that he needed to return to Nantes. He'd be back, he said. It had been fifteen years. Bob hadn't changed the sign. "I will never take it down," he said.

From our balcony, with a mountain breeze coming off the Saône, the smells of the boulangerie were inescapable. When you live here, you have no choice: Bob's bread enters your living space. The boulangerie was the village equivalent of a campfire. It held the restaurants together. It united chefs and diners. It made the quartier a gastronomic destination.

Once, I asked Bob for his secret: "Is it the yeasts? Are they what make your bread so good?"

"*Oui*," he said very, very slowly, meaning, "Well, no."

I pondered. "Is it the leavening?" Bob always insisted that a slow first rise—called *le pointage*—was essential to good bread. Factory bread-makers use high-speed mixers to whip a dough into readiness in minutes. Bob's took all night.

"*Oui-i-i-i*."

"The final resting?" Bread gets its deeper flavor in its last stages, people say.

"*Oui-i-i-i*. But no. These are the ABCs. Mainly, they are what you do *not* do to make bad bread. There is a lot of bad bread in France. Good bread comes from good flour. It's the flour."

"The flour?"

"*Oui*," he said, definitively.

I thought, Flour is flour is flour. "The flour?"

"*Oui*. The flour."

Bob bought a lot of flours, but a farm in the Auvergne provided his favorite. The Auvergne, west of Lyon, is rarely mentioned without an epithet invoking its otherness. It is *sauvage*—wild—with cliffs and forests and boar. Its mountains were formed by volcanoes, like so many chimneys. In the boulangerie, there was a picture of a goat on a steep hill. It was kept by a farmer friend, who grew the wheat that was milled locally into a flour that Bob used to make his bread. The picture was the only information that Bob's customers required. Who needs a label when you have a goat?

For Bob, farms were the "heart of Frenchness." His grandfather had been a farmer. Every one of the friends he would eventually introduce me to were also the grandchildren of farmers. They felt connected to the rhythm of plows and seasons, and were beneficiaries of a knowledge that had been in their families for generations. When Bob described it, he used the word *transmettre*, with its sense of "to hand over"—something passed between eras.

George and Frederick, enrolled in a neighborhood school, were learning their new language, hesitantly at first and then with sudden fluency. Jessica, with a mimic's gift for languages, spoke with authority and ease.

Was my French improving? No.

Did my French even exist? *Meh.*

I had a bad episode with *four*—the word in French for "oven" (pronounced as if someone has just hit you hard on the back). It sounds the same if the ovens referred to are in the plural (*fours*). And *fours* were, of course, what Bob baked his bread in, the blue-lit, glass-door contraptions on the ground floor.

One afternoon, there were two people in the back of the boulangerie: Denis, Bob's sole full-time employee, and me. Denis—thirty, with cropped blond hair and dressed in white, like a proper baker—was upstairs. I was below, making dough. When I bounded up to retrieve a sack of flour, Denis asked: the bread—was it still in the oven (*au four*)? At least, I think that this was what he said. He repeated the question, and this time it was more like "Don't tell me that the fucking bread is still in the oven?" What I heard was strong emotion and "*four*."

Four, I said to myself. *Four*. I know that word.

"*Four*?" I said, aloud this time, which was provoking, probably because it wasn't "yes" or "no."

"Au four? C'est au four? Le pain!"

Denis bolted down the stairs in what seemed to me like histrionic distress. I heard an oven door being slammed open and a bread tray yanked out on its rollers.

"Oh, putain!"

For me, the door was the prompt. Of course. *Four!* It's "oven"!

The bread was ruined. (*Putain* means "whore." *Pute* is also "whore," but "*putain!*" is what you say when you've burned a full tray of baguettes.)

One evening, Bob announced, "Tomorrow, we do deliveries. It is time to meet the real Lyon."

Bob delivered bread via an ancient dinky Citroën that he hadn't washed—ever. On the passenger seat were plastic sandwich wrappers, a half-eaten quiche, a nearly empty family-size bottle of Coca-Cola, and editions of the local paper, *Le Progrès,* that lay open at such specific spots as to suggest that this is what Bob did while driving: he caught up on the news. He pushed it all to the floor and invited me to sit. Inside was a fine white cloud, as though the air had reached a point of molecular flour saturation and none of it would quite settle. The car explained why Bob so seldom bathed. Really, what would be the point? (In the wintertime, Bob had the appearance of an old mattress.)

Bob drove fast, he talked fast, he parked badly. The first stop was L'Harmonie des Vins, on the Presqu'île, a wine bar with food ("But good food," Bob said). Two owners were in the back, busy preparing for the lunch service but delighted by the sight of their bread guy, even though he came by every day at exactly this time. I was introduced, Bob's new student, quick-quick, bag drop, kisses, out. Next: La Quintessence, a new restaurant ("Really good food," Bob said, pumping his fist), husband and wife, one prep cook, frantic, but spontaneous smiles, the introduction, the bag drop, kisses, out. We crossed the Rhône, rolled up onto a sidewalk, and rushed out, Bob with one sack of bread, me with another, trying to keep up: Les Oliviers ("Exceptional food"—a double pump—"Michelin-listed but not pretentious"), young chef, tough-guy shoulders, an affectionate face, bag drop, high-fives, out.

One eating establishment after another: in, then out. Many seemed less like businesses than like improvisations that resulted, somehow, in dinner. Chez Albert, created on a dare by friends. Le Saint-Vincent, with a kitchen no larger than a coat closet. In the Seventh Arrondissement—industrial, two-up-two-down housing, gray stucco fronts—we arrived at Le Fleurie, a bistro named after a Beaujolais *cru*, as accessible as the wine. "I love this place," Bob said: a daily chalkboard menu on the sidewalk, twelve euros for a three-course meal (lake fish with shellfish sauce, filet of pork with pepper sauce), polemically T-shirt-and-jeans informal, the food uncompromisingly seasonal (i.e., if it's winter, you eat roots). Bob walked straight to the back, a sack on his shoulder, the familiar routine. Then, the day's last delivery completed, he asked after Olivier, the chef, and was directed to the bar.

Olivier Paget, Bob's age, was born in Beaujolais, father a plumber, grandfather a vigneron, cooking since age sixteen; normal chef stuff, including stints making fancy food with *grands chefs*, like Georges Blanc, with whom Boulud had trained. But Paget, his training complete, situated himself in a remote working-class district, made good food at a fair price, and filled every seat, every lunch and dinner: tight.

"This," Bob said, "is my idea of a restaurant."

As Paget poured glasses of Beaujolais, Bob confessed to liking the idea of *grande cuisine*—cooking of the highest order. He still hoped that one day he would experience it properly. "I tried once"—a meal at Paul Bocuse's three-star Auberge, with Jacqueline, his wife. No one could have arrived with higher expectations. Few could have been more disappointed.

It wasn't the food, which Bob doesn't remember. "We were condescended to," he said. Waiters sneered at them for not knowing which glass was for which

wine, and served them with manifest reluctance. (Jacqueline is Cuban and black. That evening, there was one other black person at the restaurant: the footman, dressed up in a costume reminiscent of Southern plantation livery.) The bill was more than Bob earned in a month. It had been a mugging.

Bob knocked back his Beaujolais, and Paget poured him another, and, as I watched the easy intimacy between them, I believed that I was starting to understand what I had been seeing all morning: a fraternity, recognized by a coat of arms visible only to other members.

Through Bob, I learned about the city's eating societies, a proliferation of them: one for the *bouchon* owners; another for the *bouchon* eaters. One for the true bistros, and another for the modern ones. There was the Gueules de Lyon, which, by the designation of its members, included the city's eight coolest, philosophically unfussy, kick-ass restaurants. At least three societies were committed to hosting a real *mâchon*. (This is the all-day Lyonnais "breakfast" practice, featuring every edible morsel of a pig, limitless-seeming quantities of Beaujolais, and loud, sloppy parades of singing men who, by then, are trying to remember how to get home. I feared it.) And there were serious grownup societies, like Les Toques Blanches, whose members were the grandest of the region's *grands chefs*.

When I crossed the city, I met people I knew through Bob. I was starting to feel at home.

And then I quit.

I stepped into the boulangerie to tell him.

"Bonjour, Bill."

"Bonjour, Bob. Bob, I have decided to go to cooking school."

I could have hit him in the nose with my fist. He took a step back, as if he had lost his balance. "Oh," he whispered.

What had I done? I tried to explain, how I needed to learn kitchen skills first.

"Of course."

And that I would be back soon. If he would have me. That there was so much more to learn.

The air seemed to be leaving him. His shoulders sloped. He was just a baker, his posture said. He was Bob. Just Bob.

"You're going to L'Institut Paul Bocuse," he said—the most prestigious school in France. It was a statement, not a question.

"I am."

He whistled.

"But I will be back."

He didn't believe me.

We stood like that. He seemed to be thinking.

"At L'Institut Bocuse, you will learn *la grande cuisine*," he said forthrightly, with energy.

"I don't know."

"Of course you will." He seemed excited. "For the first time in my life, I will eat a grand meal and enjoy it. You will make me something from the repertoire of *la grande cuisine*. It will be like Bocuse but without all the Bocuse."

"Of course I will," I said.

He smiled.

"Relax—it's all online."

I tried working for Bob on Saturdays, but it was too much. Then, after L'Institut, I found work in a restaurant kitchen. ("Good food there," Bob said, "but bad bread.") Bob continued to be in our life. He made a bread, combining American and French flours, that expressed our friendship. We called it a Lafayette.

More than a year later, we asked if we could take him out to dinner. It was an indirect apology. I hadn't cooked for him yet.

He picked the day: a Tuesday—i.e., not a school night. (Bob closed on Wednesdays, like the schools, so he could be with his young daughter.) He had both bathed and shaved, a radical sight. He had also determined the itinerary, which began with his friends at L'Harmonie des Vins, because they had just taken delivery of *the* new Saint-Péray, a small-production white wine made by Alain Voge. Bob taught us that, where we lived, a wine sometimes has a release date, like a play's opening night.

Bob talked and talked and talked. He knew plenty about us. He wanted us to know about him. He talked about his father, a farmer's son ("My grandfather, my great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, all of them, for generations, were *paysans*"), who became the renowned town baker, a patriarch whom his many children sought advice from before making major decisions, and who, for no reason that anyone understood, no longer spoke to Bob's mother. ("It was strange. He spoke to the rest of us.")

About his mother, eighty-five, who pretended not to be distressed that her husband of fifty-nine years and the father of her seven children no longer spoke to her.

About his wife, Jacqueline, who was a single mother when he met her, on a vacation to Cuba, and who agreed to marry him only if the proposal was blessed by her priest, a disciple of Santería, the Caribbean religion.

About returning to Cuba to attend a ceremony, people dancing and chant-

ing, until the priest stopped the proceedings: "He held my face between his hands, and looked into my eyes, and declared, 'Your family traded in the flesh of our ancestors. You cannot marry Jacqueline. Leave my sight.'"

About his returning to France, heartbroken, and being told by his mother that there was merit in the priest's declaration, that there had been a terrible rupture in the family, because one branch traded in slaves and the other found the practice unacceptable. About how Bob returned to Havana and explained his history to the priest, who then blessed his marriage.

About his six siblings (by then we were at Les Oliviers, Bob talking faster and faster to say it all): Marc, an archivist in Paris; Jacques, between Paris and Lyon, doing this and that; a couple of sisters; another brother; and *then* Philippe, dear Philippe, four years older than Bob, and the one he talked to the least because he thought about him the most. "Philippe," Bob said, "is my greatest friend. He is half of my soul."

When Bob was growing up, every member of the family worked in his father's boulangerie at Christmas and Easter. Bob had emerged with a refrain: Everyone deserves good bread. It was like a calling or a social imperative. A *boulanger* can be counted on by the people he feeds.

Once, I asked Bob, "Which of your breads makes you the proudest?"

No hesitation. "My baguette."

"Really? The French eat ten billion baguettes a year. Yours are so different?"

"No. But mine, sometimes, are what a baguette should be."

Bob took one and brought it up to the side of my head and snapped it. The crack was thunderous.

The word *baguette* means "stick," or "baton," the kind that an orchestra conductor keeps time with, and wasn't used to describe bread until the Second World War, probably—and I say "probably" because there is invariably debate. (There is even more about how to define a baguette: Should it weigh two hundred and fifty grams? Two seventy-five? Do you care?) Tellingly, the word appears nowhere in my 1938 "Larousse Gastronomique," a thousand-page codex of French cuisine. Until *baguette* became standard, there were plenty of other big-stick bakery words, like *ficelle* (string), and *flûte* (flute), and *bâtard* (the fat one, the bastard). It doesn't matter: it is not the name that is French but the shape. A long bread has a higher proportion of crust to crumb than a round one. The shape means: crunch.

When I made baguettes, I was astonished at both the labor and the unforgiving economy—you pull off a small piece of dough and weigh it on an old metal scale, roll it out, grab one of the *couches* from a pole to let it rest, let it rise again, slash it, bake it, and then collect ninety centimes for your efforts. The slash is effected by a light slice with an angled razor blade, *une scarification,* done so weightlessly that you don't crush the loaf. But I had trouble with the slash—I couldn't do it without exerting pressure, just as I couldn't roll out the dough without squishing it. Bob had a touch that seemed to be lighter than air; he left no fingerprints.

The result was irresistible. Once, when we were having lunch at Le Fleurie, Bob directed my attention to a woman on the far side of the room: well dressed, gray hair in a bun, eating by herself. She was removing a sliced baguette from the basket and meticulously putting it, piece by piece, into her purse, where there appeared to be a napkin to fold it into. She closed her purse and put her hand up for a waiter's attention: *"Plus de pain, s'il vous plaît."* More bread, please.

I popped into the boulangerie late one morning. Bob was in the back. No one else was there. I waited several minutes before he walked out.

"I was on the phone with my mother. My brother Philippe. He had an aneurysm this morning. He is dead."

Il est mort.

Bob was pale, flat eyes, no affect, able to relay the news but seemingly unable to understand what he was saying. "He is fifty. He *was* fifty. An aneurysm. This morning."

Bob left to attend the funeral. When he returned, he was ponderous, in manner and movement. One morning, he didn't show up at the boulangerie. Another time, I watched him standing by a street light, seeming to stare at nothing. The light changed, then changed back. He didn't cross. His thoughts were like a black tide moving back and forth inside his head. I feared for him.

"I have to change my life," he told Jessica. "I must make Lucas a partner." Lucas was the first baker Bob employed who had his lightness of touch. "I have to share the workload."

He seemed to have instantly gained weight. He wasn't sleeping. The nights, he said, were the hardest: "That's when I think of him. I have never been closer to a human being, those nights, making bread."

One Saturday night, as Bob mourned, a kid threw a rock at the back-room window, shattering it. On Saturday nights, everyone comes into Lyon. It is noisy and drunken, and stuff happens. On this particular Saturday, Bob was in the back, thinking of his brother. The broken window was an affront. Bob, apparently, gave chase down the Quai Saint-Vincent.

Is it possible that Bob thought he could catch the vandal? By what impulsive leap of the imagination did he regard himself as a sprinter?

The quai there was badly lit, the curb stacked with boards left over from a construction project. Bob tripped and fell and broke his leg. He had to pull himself back onto the sidewalk to avoid being run over. Bob, whose work means standing on his feet, had to give up the boulangerie for an inconceivably long time.

Roberto Bonomo, the quartier's Italian chef, was in touch with Bob and provided updates. After a month, he was still supine, Roberto told us, but the break seemed to be healing. Bob had attempted walking with crutches.

I began preparing a dinner for his return, a *grande cuisine* dish that I had been practicing, *tourte de canard* (duck pie). Bob needed some love and affection. He would, I was sure, really like a piece of pie.

The boulangerie continued—Lucas's bread was flawless—with one persistent problem: the flour kept running out. Lucas didn't know how often Bob ordered it. In most bakeries, you buy flour in bulk; it is always there, you don't think about it. But Bob got his flour from small

farmers who valued its freshness. It was, in effect, milled to order. He might get some at the beginning of the week. On Friday, he would ask for more. Or on Wednesday. The deliveries would be stacked by the staircase: forty big, dusty sacks, fifty. Lucas, suddenly without flour, had to close until the next delivery.

One Sunday, Roberto threw a party, only his regulars, his best food, the best wine. Bob promised to come, Roberto said: "He'll be on crutches, but he'll be there." When we turned up, Bob hadn't arrived yet. Babysitter issues, Roberto said.

Bob died while we were drinking wine and eating bruschetta. A clot developed in the leg, came loose, rushed up an artery, and lodged in his lungs. He knew at once that he was in fatal trouble. Jacqueline called an ambulance. He was unconscious before it arrived.

I learned this in the morning. I rushed down to the boulangerie. I didn't know what else to do. I opened the door, and the bell jingled, and Ailene, one of Bob's helpers, came out from the back, because it was the routine to come out at the sound of the bell. She saw me and stopped, lower lip trembling, holding herself still. I thought, If she carries on as though nothing has changed, if Lucas makes the bread at 3 A.M. and she sells it, can we all pretend that Bob is still at home recuperating?

The bell jingled, and one of the quartier's restaurant people appeared, a waiter. He was bald, quiet, thin, one of the five people who ran Chez Albert, a purple-painted place, decorated with chicken images, that served good, unradical food. The waiter was bearing a large bread sack that needed filling. He handed it to Ailene and said he'd pick it up later.

"Bisous à Bob." Kisses to Bob.

"Bob is dead." *Bob est mort.* The waiter stood, unmoving, taking in the simple, declarative piece of news. *Bob est mort.* He didn't ask Ailene to repeat herself. He didn't ask how or when or where. The questions would have been an evasion, an effort to fill this sudden void with noise.

"Putain de merde," he said finally. A nonsense phrase. Two bad words in one, as though it were the worst thing you could say. Or it was just what you say when you don't have the words.

When you live on a river, you are never not thinking about it. You see it on waking, hear it in nighttime barges that slice through it, feel it in the dampness of the air. It's never the same—rising, rushing, sinking, slow in fog, thick in the summer—and is also always the same. Bob used to throw his unsold baguettes into it. Only now does it occur to me that, with bread that he had made single-handedly, he couldn't do the obvious and put it out with the trash. He seemed to need to replicate the making of it in its unmaking, tossing the baguettes, one by one, as if returning them to nature for the birds and the fish.

Bob had held the quartier together, a community of like-minded food fanatics, and when he died we briefly considered returning to the United States. We didn't, we couldn't, until finally, after five years in Lyon, we went back for many reasons, including the fact that our children, who could read and write in French, were having trouble speaking English.

I returned the following year on my own, to visit Lac du Bourget, the largest lake in France, a piece of unfinished business. I spent the night at La Source, a farmhouse turned into a restaurant with rooms, which was run by a husband-and-wife team, members of the Maîtres Restaurateurs, a chefs' collective committed to making as much as possible from scratch: butter churned by hand, fresh ice cream daily.

At breakfast, I scooped up butter on the tip of my knife and tasted it. It was fatty and beautifully bovine. The bread

was curious. It had been sliced from a rectangular loaf and, to my prejudiced eye, looked store-bought and industrial. I had a bite. It wasn't store-bought. Wow, I thought. This is good bread.

The flour, the owner told me, was from Le Bourget-du-Lac, on the other side of the lake. The name of the miller was Philippe Degrange. I wrote it down. It didn't seem right. A grange is where you store your grains. Degrange? It would be akin to buying milk from a guy named Dairy.

I drove to the town and got a coffee. At the bar, I Googled "Degrange"—and there he was. Minoterie Degrange. What was a *minoterie*? I looked it up. "Flour mill." It appeared to be within walking distance. I set off.

After half an hour, my doubts returned. The addresses were erratic, and the street—flower beds, trimmed hedges, garages for the family car—was unequivocally suburban. Was there really an operation here, milling only local grains? But then, just when I decided to turn back, voilà! In the shade of tall trees, half obscured by thick foliage, was a small letter-slot mailbox, no street number but a name, Minoterie Degrange.

The trees and a high metal gate, covered with graffiti, hid whatever was behind. Next to the mail slot was a speaker box. I pressed a button.

"Oui?" the speaker box said, a woman's voice.

"Bonjour," I told the box. "I have eaten a bread made from your flour, and I would like to meet the owner, Monsieur Degrange?"

Nothing.

"But it's lunchtime," the box said finally.

"Of course. I'm sorry. I'll wait."

Another protracted silence. Then the gate opened and revealed an industrial yard, completely out of keeping with its neighbors. A man emerged, round and robust, with a factory foreman's forthrightness, wiping his mouth with a napkin. He looked at me hard.

"Monsieur Degrange?" I confirmed. "Please excuse me. I ate a slice of bread that was made, I believe, with your flour, and it reminds me of the bread that my friend Bob used to make."

He pointed to a car: "Get in."

I got in.

"It's all about the flour," he said. "I'll take you to Boulangerie Vincent."

The boulangerie, a few miles down the road, was also a bar and a pub and a restaurant with tablecloths. The door opened directly onto the *four* and a cooling rack built against a wall. The top rows were for *boules* ("balls," the ancient way of bread baking), about thirty of them. On the bottom were *couronnes*, massive, each fashioned into a ring like a crown. A woman, carefully dressed,

affluent in manner, was negotiating with the bread guy.

"*Mais, Pierre, s'il vous plaît.* Just one *boule,* please. I have guests tonight."

"I am very sorry, madame, but every loaf has a name attached to it. You know that. If you haven't reserved, I can't give you one."

"He does two ferments," Degrange whispered, "and starts at seven in the evening. The bread needs ten hours. Or twelve. Sometimes fourteen."

Inside, men were gathered around a bar—electricians, cable people, metalworkers, painters, *mecs*. The room roared with conviviality. Degrange ordered us *diots*, a Savoyard sausage, and a glass of wine, a local Mondeuse. Through the door to a kitchen, I saw hundreds of *diots*, drying in the air, looped by a string. They were cooked in a deep sauté pan with onions, red wine, and two bay leaves, and served in a roll made with Degrange's flour.

It had the flavors that I had tasted at breakfast. I asked for another roll, broke it open, and stuck my nose into *la mie,* the crumb—Frederick's routine. It smelled of yeast and oven-caramelized aromas, and of something else, an evocative fruitiness. I closed my eyes. Bob.

"You recognize it," Degrange said. "It comes from wheat that grew in good soil."

"Where do you get it?"

"Small farms. Nothing more than forty hectares."

Small farms, he explained, are often the only ones in France with soil that hasn't been ruined.

"Where are they?"

"Here in Savoie. And the Rhône Valley. They grow an old wheat, a quality wheat. And the Auvergne. I love the wheat from the Auvergne. Everyone does. The volcanic soil, the iron-rich dirt. You can taste it in the bread."

We drank another glass of Mondeuse. Degrange proposed that we go back: "I want to show you the factory."

A Degrange has been milling flour here, or on a site closer to the river, since 1704. Until modern times, the operation was powered by water; on a wall was an old photo of Degrange's father and grandfather, seated before a mill paddle wheel three times their height. There are no mill paddles today. The process is whirringly hidden in pipes and generators and computer screens—except for the source material, freshly picked wheat that is tipped out from hydraulically raised trailers. I followed Degrange up ladder-like stairs to the third floor, where he opened the cap of a pipe and retrieved a cupful of a bright-golden grain.

"Taste."

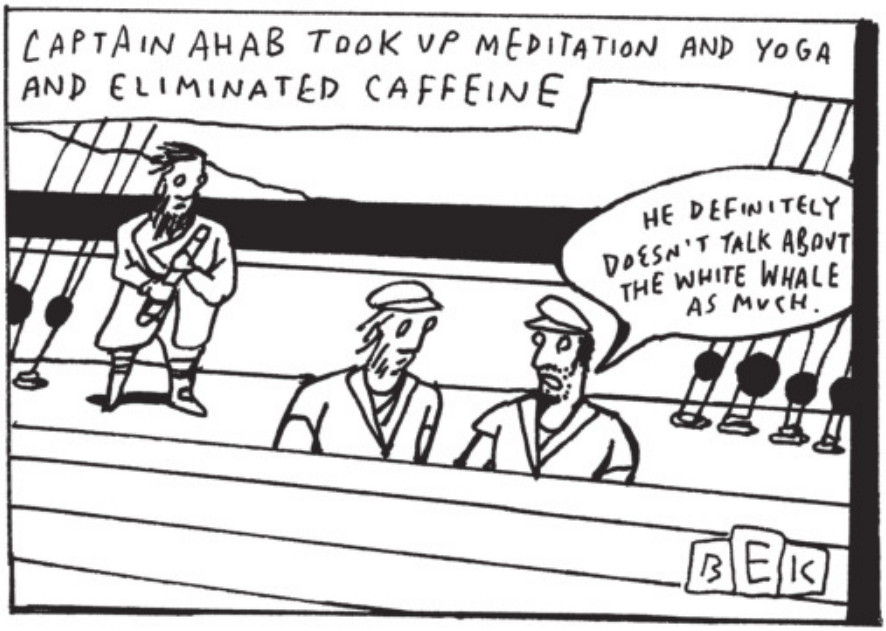
It seemed to dissolve in my mouth, creamy and sweet and long in flavor. "What is it?"

"Wheat germ."

I wanted to take some home. "You'll have to refrigerate it," he said. "It is like flour but more extreme. It has fat, which spoils rapidly."

He described conventional flour production—the sprawling farms in the French breadbasket or the American Midwest, their accelerated-growth tricks, their soils so manipulated that they could have been created in a chemistry lab. "The bread that you make from it has the right texture. But it doesn't have the taste, the *goût*." He asked an assistant to bring him a baguette, then tore off a piece, smelled it, and looked at it approvingly.

"In the country, we don't change as fast as people in the city," Degrange said. "For us, the meal is still important. We don't 'snack,'" he said, using the English word. "What I learned from my father and grandfather is what they learned from their fathers and grandfathers. There is a handing off between generations." The word he used was *transmettre. Le goût et les valeurs sont transmis.* Flavor and value: those are the qualities that are transmitted. Only in France would "flavor" and "value" have the same moral weight.


CAPTAIN AHAB TOOK UP MEDITATION AND YOGA AND ELIMINATED CAFFEINE
HE DEFINITELY DOESN'T TALK ABOUT THE WHITE WHALE AS MUCH.
BEK

• •

Degrange gave me a ten-kilo bag of his flour. A gift. I said goodbye, an affectionate embrace, feeling an unexpected closeness to this man I had reached by intercom only a few hours ago, and who instantly knew what I was talking about: *goût.*

I was flying home in the morning and reserved a *boule* at the Boulangerie Vincent. I contemplated the prospect of arriving in New York bearing bread for my children which had been made near Le Lac du Bourget earlier that very day. On the way to the airport, I stopped to pick it up. It was dawn, and there were no lights on inside, just the red glow from the oven. My *boule* was hot and irresistibly fragrant.

In New York, I cut a few thick slices and put out some butter. "I think you'll like this," I said.

Frederick took a slice and sniffed it and then slammed it into his face, inhaling deeply: "It's like Bob's."

George ate a slice, then asked for another and spread butter on it.

When the loaf was done, I made more from the ten-kilo bag. It was good—not as good as the *boule* from the Boulangerie Vincent, but still good. It had fruit and complexity and a feeling of nutritiousness. A month later, it was gone, and I stopped making bread. ♦

DISPATCHES FROM A PANDEMIC

Responses to the coronavirus crisis.

A TEMPORARY MOMENT IN TIME

Shakespeare did his finest work under quarantine, I keep hearing. I wonder how the Bard would regard today's "craft hour" in our apartment, which ended after eight minutes. I'd Googled "easy art projects anyone can do," and selected "DIY jellyfish." We forged ahead, with the same delusional optimism that has fuelled our recent "pantry meals," when we have three of a recipe's twelve ingredients. We had to improvise a little, since our shopping list had prioritized diapers, medicine, Clorox wipes, gallon bags of dour legumes and their party-girl cousins, coffee beans. Of the many things I'd failed to foresee: a need for googly eyes, hole punchers, and vials of glitter. We wound up with a Styrofoam coffee cup stabbed through with neon straws. "Mama, this is not a jellyfish," my three-year-old son, Oscar, said, with a preternaturally mature sorrow.

We rarely watch the television, but on this first weekday morning of an eerily quiet Austin, Texas, we decided to keep it on, a portal to the wider world. Dr. Irwin Redlener, from the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, said, on CNN, "We are so incredibly underprepared for a major onslaught to the hospitals, which is basically now inevitable." Shortages of I.C.U. beds and ventilators. Hospitals rationing gloves and masks. "Googly eyes," Oscar said, and I nodded. It took me three minutes to remember the word for the doctor's expression: apoplectic.

Homeschool lessons this morning have included: "Your sister's head is not a bongo" and "Don't touch those crackers to your penis before you eat them, son." Sometimes you need to sacrifice a good feeling in the name of hygiene. On the TV screen, the Surgeon General appears, begging Americans to keep their distance. This paradoxical message, "We need to come together by staying apart," has galvanized a silence on the ordinarily festive streets of downtown Austin that tells a story in a whisper: infected droplets are spreading through the air, and this is the new way we are caring for one another.

Next, we played doctor, a game that involves my son hitting my forehead with his toy hammer and then saying, in a gentle, condescending falsetto, "It's not hurting you, Mama." It's a bright, false voice he learned from us. This game has taught me something essential about the gaslighting that kids routinely experience from adults—sometimes well-meaning, often self-serving.

"Just a little, little poke . . ."

On March 11th, after the World Health Organization officially announced that the coronavirus was a pandemic, President Donald Trump spoke at a congressional hearing on the issue. "This is not a financial crisis," he assured us. "This is just a temporary moment of time that we will overcome together as a nation and as a world."

It's not hurting you, my son promised, bringing the hammer down.

It's hard to know what's true right now. Everything feels heightened and accelerated, including the speed with which fact overtakes fiction, and a truth can mutate into a lie. A few days ago, I had an entirely different understanding of the threat. My son was still attending his day care. We were debating whether to cancel a family reunion in April. On March 16th, staring at our ghostly reflections in empty store windows, now tenanted by mannequins in bikinis who failed to get the memo, I feel a kind of ontological whiplash. Why was I so slow to understand the gravity of this emergency, even as the virus caseloads continued to grow exponentially around the globe?

On the television, a bespectacled Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, took the stand, explaining the stakes and the contours of the global public-health crisis to a bewildered nation. He is a man charged with telling an unhappy story with no clear end in sight. He insists on empirical verification, and he has maintained his equilibrium, and his authority, on the rolling ellipses that carry him from one press conference and mounting crisis to the next.

Fauci's unvarnished candor is often at odds with Trump's jack-o'-lantern reassurances, glowing and hollow. Fauci is never self-congratulatory, and, tonally, he sits level on the water, neither overly buoyant nor despondent.

"Is the worst yet to come, Dr. Fauci?" Representative Carolyn Maloney, of New York, asked at the March 11th hearing.

"Yes, it is."

I am touched, and sometimes rattled, by the children's innate faith in us. In recent weeks, I've felt like a child myself, tuning in nightly to watch press briefings, hungry for reassurance and direction, eager to hear experts subtitle a novel reality for me. A press briefing is a story told in medias res, and even our most trusted experts, like Dr. Fauci, can narrate it only from their blinkered perspective in the present tense. Nobody yet knows how or when the COVID-19 pandemic ends.

My son's questions are my own, and I have no answers—

"When will the germs go away?" "What will happen to the people with no homes?" "When can I see my Gaga? My Nonni? My Papa? My Tia? My Lala?"

Limbo is a hard place to settle into, and describing the unknown to a newcomer is not easy. The C.D.C. offers parents this guidance for talking to children: "Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma." Be truthful and accurate. Fauci has good parenting

NEW YORK CITY, BY JORGE COLOMBO

advice as well: "It's really, really tough because you have to be honest with the American public and you don't want to scare the hell out of them." My son accepts the answer "I don't know" a lot more gracefully than I do.

Speaking of Shakespeare—he was the minister who officiated marriages of words that have endured to this day, weirs of metaphor that we still use when we go fishing for new truths, lines of poetry that nearly all English speakers repeat, as well as phrases so common we have forgotten their origin:

That way madness lies.
Wild-goose chase.
Into thin air.
Lie low.
We have seen better days.

Today, we are witnessing the shotgun weddings of words into some strange unions, neologisms sped into existence by this virus ("quarantunes," "quarantini"), epidemiological vocabulary hitched together by Twitter hashtags. It seems like there is a parallel language contagion occurring. "Self-isolation," "social distancing," "abundance of caution"—pairs of words I'd never seen together in a sentence back in January have become ubiquitous. These phrases are travelling even faster than the virus, eye to mind, ear to mouth, disseminated by our iPhone screens and televisions.

"Community spread" may be my least favorite on the COVID-19 vocabulary list. It makes me picture a local theatre company with terrible British accents sneezing onto the audience. Nudists rolling like seals on checkered picnic blankets. "That's a you problem," my husband says. Fair enough.

Language is everywhere these days, and humans seem to have less and less to do with it. Are there English majors chained under the earth, forced to write these lines, or did an algorithm of some kind generate them? The Mad Libs of the press releases and public statements . . .

With an unholiness of fiscal reassurance.
With a cornucopia of dread.
With a punch bowl of amnesia.
With an oil barrel of greedy optimism.
With an I.V. drip of information.
With a loneliness of symptoms.
With a paucity of masks.

With an embarrassment of #quarantine memes.

Of the language generalized by this new virus, "flatten the curve" is the three-word spell I find most useful. "Flatten the curve" is a night-blooming locution that seemed to appear in everyone's mental back yard at the same time. There it was, right when we needed it, a phrase to recast the stakes of the pandemic after containment had failed and people needed a way to understand both the tsunami-like horror and the hope prompting measures like statewide mandates to stay indoors. "Flatten the curve" caused a paradigm shift for me; it taught me, in three words, to stop thinking of myself as a potential victim of COVID-19 and to start thinking of myself as a vector for contagion. It alchemizes fear into action. The phrase is an injunction: it says, gently and urgently, that it is not too late for us to change the shape of this story.

Quiet is disquieting on the streets of downtown Austin. For two hours, I drag my son behind me in his black wagon. He is holding his "magic," a bamboo stick, singing a nonsense song. I feel like we are staging a G-rated remake of Cormac McCarthy's "The Road." Maybe PG-13, since the public bathroom was closed, and after an accident my son is now pantsless.

On a distant hill, a tiny silhouette appears, gliding on air. A boy on a scooter. My son begins waving frantically, like a marooned sailor spotting the rescue chopper. "Hey, kid!" But the boy's mother sees us and leads him in the opposite direction. "No kids," my son says, bewildered and then resigned. I sit between two large rocks, eating sunshine with him. A lizard does push-ups. Two sunburned white guys in their sixties stroll by, chatting about the secrets they keep from their wives. "Hey, nice to have a big guy with you at a time like this," one of them says, patting my son on the back. I freeze, say nothing.

A mother and her four-year-old daughter join us; we keep accidentally closing the gap between our bodies and apologizing. Our kids want to play chase. No, we say. My son, who has an extraordinary legal mind, suggests a loophole: can they run next to each other? "We won't catch each other," he promises. The other mother coughs, and apologizes; almost balletically, we separate the children. My son follows without a peep of protest, a docility that frightens me, as whatever my face is doing seems to be frightening him.

A few months ago, in this same park, I'd look skyward at this hour to clock the moment when a great scattering of starlings begins to wheel as one. Called murmurations, these flocks gather in the purple Texas dusk. Spiky iridescent birds that stitch themselves into a single animate cloud. (Starlings are an invasive species; in 1890, a Shakespeare enthusiast released sixty starlings into Central Park, as part of a whimsical mission to introduce to North America every bird ever mentioned in Shakespeare's works; today we have two hundred million.) These enormous flocks can execute sharp turns and vortical spins with a magical-feeling coördination. A thousand starlings bunch into a living fist over the trees, relax westward, shear away behind the eastern skyscrapers. With a kind of muscular clairvoyance, each bird seems to anticipate the movements of the others. What is deciding them? What permits a thousand autonomous actors to move as one body, at these unbelievable speeds?

A recent study described how these birds are able to "manage uncertainty in consensus": "Flocks of starlings exhibit a remarkable ability to maintain cohesion as a group in highly uncertain environments and with limited, noisy information."

Rolling the stroller down the hill, I wave to strangers on their porches. Wind chimes cast their melancholy spell, as the skyline turns into a pink Stonehenge. Two boys are dribbling a basketball in the growing dark, their tiny eyes peering out from a garage. Nobody crosses the six-foot barrier; you might argue that humans have never been less like a flock than at this moment of voluntary isolation. But I also feel that our stasis is itself a kind of secret flight. Externally, we are all separating from public spaces, cancelling weddings and graduations, retreating into our homes. This physical separation belies what is happening on another plane: people are responding to the crisis with a surprising unity. More swiftly than I would have thought possible, hundreds of millions

BOLOGNA, ITALY, BY BIANCA BAGNARELLI

are heeding a difficult call to stay at home. It's a way of soaring into formation. And yet "murmuration" seems like the right word for the great convergence of humans travelling through this time together, listening to the latest news with our whole bodies, alert to subtle atmospheric changes, making constant recalibrations in response to the fluxing crisis at speeds to rival the dervishing starlings. How rapidly we are adjusting our behavior, to protect one another.

—Karen Russell

THE PROPHYLACTIC LIFE

Here in the village of X, we remain hopeful. As inhabitants of an old Yankee town, we have always practiced social distance. Half of us still seem to live in the Before Times and half in the New Truth. Our market, post office, and liquor store are full. In a wealthier village nearby, people wear high-end face masks while they shop. In a poorer village with greater exposure to state television, a sign at a café warns of the virus from "Wuhan China." The virus is surely among us, but it still feels distant, cosmopolitan. How soon before that changes? Will it have changed by the time you're reading this?

I drive by the houses of friends, their front parlors lit. Their lives look so toasty in the morning fog. Approaching my own house, I can see a stack of freshly laundered towels in the upstairs bathroom window and this places me in a deep, familial calm. I know of workaholics desperately looking for work. Some in tech or finance who usually spend their days in airport lounges may be surprised to discover that they have families. My six-year-old spends much of the day in a laptop haze as his playdates and education Zoom by. When the sun sets, we engage in fierce rounds of the Russian card game Durak ("the Fool"). According to some traditions, the loser, or Fool, must scrunch under the table and yell out, "*Koo-ka-ree-koo!*" ("Cock-a-doodle-doo!"). This is what I'll remember twenty years later, if there is a twenty years later: acting the rooster to my son's delight.

During the day, I present without symptoms. But I wake up at three in the morning in a sweat, without fail. I don't have the virus. I have the fear. The sickness is bad, but the response is worse. I am a Leningrader. My grandfather died during the siege, trying to defend the city. Stalin was unprepared for the onslaught; he had executed his best generals before the war even began. The Army was unprepared. My grandfather was likely not issued a firearm. My father used to say that some soldiers fought the Germans with sticks. Seventy-five years later, our nominal leader has eliminated the pandemic-response team, has surrounded himself with sycophants and *duraki*. The increasingly scared and depressed tone of his appearances recalls Stalin's tone when he first realized the scope of the crisis. What will our leader do when he realizes he is cornered? How will he ever give up power and surrender himself to his reckoning? I top off the tank of my car every time I go for a drive. The border with Canada is now closed.

We are walking a lot more now. I walk about six miles every day, always trying out new routes, discovering unexpected pastures brimming with muddy

sheep. The weather is cold, with occasional intimations of spring. Everything is awaiting resurrection. I spend twenty minutes looking at an owl as she scans the horizon, west, south, east, north. I have never noticed the power of a squirrel's jaw as she grips an acorn. Lord, please help me make something out of all this stillness.

Deep in the woods, the tree frogs and vagabond geese make for an awful symphony, as if they are trying to outhonk and out-screech one another. A flash storm overtakes me as I pass a derelict international children's camp. I shelter inside what used to be an outdoor theatre space. Above me are drawings of the flags of various countries. There is a rotting wooden stage, along with the exhortation "Change the World." I step on a Nerf football that looks like it has been mauled by the local possums.

On another walk, I meet an elderly couple on P— Road. The man is wearing a Marist College cap and his age makes him part of the vulnerable demographic. (As an asthmatic, I am vulnerable as well.) "Another human being!" the man shouts. "Another human being! Which road are you from?" I tell him. "We had someone from O— Road walking here yesterday!" It is as if we are living in medieval times, a meeting of pilgrims on the dusty highway. *What news do you bring of O— Road?*

My friend N. suggests tele-drinking. I finally give in and download Zoom on my laptop. At first, it's a bit awkward, but soon I get soused and chummy, laughing and shouting at the screen. I don't like how quickly I can get used to this. Maybe we were preparing for this life all along, the prophylactic life of homes and screens and pantries. "How are things in the city?" I ask N. "I'm not *in* the city," he says. Oh, right.

I dream of the books on my shelves being used as kindling by invading squatters. The dream has a peaceful finality to it that I actually like. In the dream, I am watching the squatters from a distance. Perhaps I am watching them on a screen. But, if that's the case, then where *am* I, exactly? Where is my mind's eye?

Sometimes when I wake up at three in the morning I scroll through the Before Times. A recent restaurant meal with a friend who told me some very bad news with a smile. A long farewell hug from an Italian friend who is in her nineties. Drinks with a man who has fallen in love with his wife for the second time. I run through their lives like an A.I. trying to learn its way into humanity. My mind rotates around and around, like an owl's head. Rumination is the coin of my realm. Interiority breeds interiority. We are all living in a Rachel Cusk novel now.

During the early days of the New Truth, I want to grow out a beard that will be the envy of the local farmers. But before I do I go down to the village and get a passport photo taken for the After Times. They make you take off your glasses for passport photos, but I always forget: are you allowed to smile anymore? I think of life under the table and the laughter of my boy. The corners of my mouth crinkle. *Koo-ka-ree-koo!*

—Gary Shteyngart

THE NEW CALM

I don't feel much like reading these days; who does? Who has the time, with all the kids at home? Or who can concentrate? Yesterday, my reading consisted of "Go, Dog. Go!," a feat achieved while trying to fathom, or simply to bear, the feeling of delighting in phonetic discovery as I sit on a warm couch next to a person I adore, while so much fear, sorrow, uncertainty, and panic surges outside. An outside that looks like nothing but an empty street, flat—if not radiant—with the new calm.

The feeling led me to pull Natalia Ginzburg down from the shelf; I felt a sudden need to reread "Winter in the Abruzzi," an essay I consider one of the most perfect and devastating ever written. It's only five and a half pages; I managed to read it while shepherding my son through another utterly chaotic, thoroughly well-intentioned Zoom class for second graders.

Ginzburg's essay begins as a descriptive tale of a small Italian town in winter: cavernous kitchens lit by oak fires, prosciutto hanging from the ceilings, women who've lost their teeth by age thirty, deepening snow. Then, on the second page, Ginzburg tells us simply, "Our lot was exile." She doesn't say why, but it's the early nineteen-forties in Italy, so we can imagine. She then tells us about her new life in the village with her young children and her husband, an anti-Fascist professor who writes at an oval table in their kitchen. We hear about their routines, their bitterness, their delights, and their trepidation, suspended, as they are, in a rich and eerie lull. The essay wears an epigraph from Virgil: *Deus nobis haec otia fecit.* God has granted us this respite.

And a respite it turns out to be, as the appalling, crystalline last paragraph of the essay makes clear: "My husband died in Regina Coeli prison in Rome a few months after we left the village. When I confront the horror of his solitary death, of the anguished choices that preceded his death, I have to wonder if this really happened to us, we who bought oranges at Giro's and went walking in the snow. I had faith then in a simple, happy future, rich with fulfilled desires, with shared experiences and ventures. But that was the best time of my life, and only now, that it's gone forever, do I know it." The essay closes with a date, 1944.

As the wise wisely instruct us to count our blessings—which I do—I also can't help but wonder how to sustain this sense of gratitude through the undulations of daily domestic life when so many of our homes balloon not only with love and recognition but also with stress, turbulence, even violence, from forces within and without. If this question is rhetorical, it's because I don't want anyone—including myself—to feel that they're doing kinship wrong if and when it hurts. Today, for me, it hurts. It is sweet, and it hurts. I think it hurt sometimes for Ginzburg, too, and it's not clear to me that it could have been different, even if she knew all that was to come.

The murder of Ginzburg's faith in "a simple, happy future, rich with fulfilled desires" is cruel. It is also the sound of human lives cresting against material and mortal limits, of flesh grinding into history. Earlier in the essay, she drives the point home: "There is a certain dull uniformity in human destiny. The course of our lives follows ancient and immutable laws, with an ancient, changeless rhythm. Dreams never come true, and the instant they are shattered, we realize how the greatest joys of our life

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, BY ADRIAN TOMINE

lie beyond the realm of reality." I differ from Ginzburg in that I have never been able to look for (or find) any joys, great or small, beyond the realm of reality, whatever that means (I am reading her, after all, in translation). Or, at least, I haven't yet. But her sense of ancient and immutable law seems to me spot on, and, in certain circumstances, a great relief.

I don't mean to imply that there aren't ten thousand reasons that we shouldn't be where we are today, or that no one is responsible for the suffering at hand and to come. People are responsible, and we know their names. People were also responsible for the murder of Ginzburg's husband, who went from writing at that oval table surrounded by his children's toys to dying of cardiac arrest and acute cholecystitis in prison (the latter being a gallbladder infection likely brought on by torture). I only mean to say that, for those steeped in the belief that great calamity should not, cannot, be our lot—or that, if we work hard enough or try hard enough or hope hard enough or are good or inventive enough, we might be able to outfox it—it can be a relief to admit our folly and rejoin the species, which is defined, as are all forms of life, by a terrible and precious precarity, to which some bodies need no reintroduction.

I think I reached for "Winter in the Abruzzi" because I needed this reminder, I needed its stern and tender fellowship, which it delivered to me today across seventy-six years and 6,331 miles (much farther than six feet away). That the essay brought me to tears was not new. But this time, rather than weep for Ginzburg alone, I wept for us all, as we, too, bought oranges at Girò's, and went walking in the snow.

—Maggie Nelson

THE NURSE'S OFFICE

So sue me: I sometimes find President Trump's voice reassuring. Not what he says. Not the actual words (although once in a while one of his "incredibles" reaches inside my chest cavity and magically calms the tachycardia). Trump's primitive syntax, imperfectly designed for the young foreign woman he married, always dismays. But during a coronavirus-task-force press conference, when one hears him on the radio, from another room, his voice has music. Sorry. It does. A singer's timbre; it is easy on the ear. Trump's is a voice you use to calm down people you yourself have made furious. (His foremost mimics—Alec Baldwin, Stephen Colbert—have not captured its pitch, its air, its softness, which they substitute with dopiness, which is also there.) For the first ten minutes, before his composure slackens and he becomes boastful and irritable, he actually just wants to be Santa Claus in his own Christmas movie, and the quality of his voice is that of a pet owner calming a pet. I hear it!

And for those ten minutes the animal part of me is soothed. The part of me that understands only seven English words and wants a biscuit in the shape of a bone wags its tail.

The first time the stock market heard him speak soothingly, at a press conference in March, it shot up happily. Exactly like a happy dog. The second time, the market was not so fooled. The third time, it was tired and seemed to

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL, BY RUTU MODAN

say, *Really*? The anxiety of quarantine, sheltering in place, economic downturn—the anxiety itself is getting tired, and when anxiety gets tired it turns into despair. And now? Trump's almost daily voice has lost some of its velvet. It has gone a little scratchy, like an old record, as if he may have a sore throat. The hospital ships are *magnificent* and *unbelievable*. The recovery later this year will be just *incredible*. The experts are *tremendous*.

So what are we dealing with? Let us not make everything about Trump. (Although a germophobe brought down by a germ is a weird irony that one could talk about for a long time.) Sometimes, while we are socially distant, this all can still feel strangely like an active-school-shooter drill. Using a real but amateur shooter? Let us hope so, since the nurse's office is in chaos. Still, as with active-shooter drills, the P.T.S.D. of the enactors is real, and we have no choice but to follow instructions. Things are slowly being put in place, but other things are a mess. Most alarming are the statistics on ventilators, respirators, masks. The nurse's office.

If one looks up the 2003 SARS outbreak on the World Health Organization's Web site, one sees descriptions that are very like those for this new coronavirus, which is a close relative. Symptoms (respiratory distress), sources (bats, civets). This go-round, the term "SARS" has become simply "the coronavirus" (a general virus listed on the can of Lysol, which kills 99.9 per cent of germs); Trump has tried to call it the Chinese virus, because of the Wuhan tie. Regardless, it is SARS again, mutated only slightly. Why no medicines were developed for the first SARS virus, why no wartime effort was brought to bear on it back then, remains a mystery (though in 2003 the Bush Administration was very busy invading Iraq).

Meanwhile? We are in the zombie apocalypse, which my students have been writing about for well over a decade, so young people are mentally prepared. Is a virus not a kind of zombie, a quasi life-form moving in and out of inertness? It is zombie time: the virus can't be transmitted when all of its hosts have died. So we are all social-distancing; that is, pretending to have died, lying very still, so the virus—the shooter in the school—won't get us. "Nobody here but us chickens."

But such weird non-zombie sadness in the world! As we work remotely and remotely work and others lose their livelihoods entirely. Who knew our socioeconomic structures were so flimsy? On our laptops, we spend a lot of time participating in group e-mails and Zoom parties and solitary tours of YouTube. Perhaps, like me, you have Google-stalked Brian Stokes Mitchell, and have listened to him sing "This Nearly Was Mine," from "South Pacific," thirty times in a weekend. No? The performance takes place at Carnegie Hall, its stage the very throat of civilization—and of civilization now momentarily shuttered. It is also a song made for quarantine, with a bit of quarantine written into it. Perhaps, after all the listening, and realizing that you are learning all the words—do not the hours *fly as day flies from moonlight*?—for a moment you feel that you and Brian Stokes Mitchell have somehow always been soul mates (were you not born the same year?) and that you *need to tell him of*

PARIS, FRANCE, BY VINCENT MAHÉ

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, BY JISU CHOI

your feelings to make him understand (a verbatim phrase from your seventh-grade diary).

This is the mad dash of love in the time of cholera, the exaggerated eccentricities of isolation. One friend writes in an e-mail that with his new leisure at home he is exploring the blades of his food processor and slicing everything in sight. Another friend writes that she meets in a neutral room of her house once a day to have tea with her daughter, who is home from college. To provide a sense of variation and café society, they use different tea sets and meet in different neutral rooms.

The musicians who have Zoomed their concerts and made amusing videos to cheer us up (shout-out to the talented Chris Mann!) show the human spirit at its most resilient. People are indeed incredible. And music may be what will keep us sane if misty-eyed in the apocalypse. The more maddening world where everyone seeks advantage over someone else and pits his or her children against the children of others will ultimately have to bow down to a different, more democratically uplifting one. As the comedian Rob Schneider has remarked, not even intending to be funny, "I've seen people handle death with more grace and more dignity than people running out of toilet paper." But wickedness brought on by panic can be swept away by other breezes. Even without the acoustics of Carnegie Hall, I sometimes think I hear them.

—Lorrie Moore

RIPPLE EFFECTS

I suspected that things might be getting serious when, at a memorial for an elderly friend, who'd died long before COVID-19 was a pandemic, many of us tried to figure out how to greet one another. The scenario might have amused our friend, who'd died of natural causes, in the arms of his wife, at the age of ninety-three. His memorial was one of the last gatherings on the main campus of Florida International University, which soon afterward moved to online learning. The remarks on our friend's life and work were preceded by a public-service announcement reminding the sixty or so of us to wash our hands frequently, cough into our elbows, and avoid close physical contact.

"It will be hard not to touch," we said to one another. "We're Haitians." In saying this, we were perhaps echoing what so many other groups around the world had said on similar occasions: "We're_____." We did what we could with elbow bumps, but there were occasional lapses into tearful hugs and kisses, until someone jokingly suggested a butt bump, which a few of us tried, with mutual consent. We were not yet fully aware that there were people around the world dying painful and lonely deaths, some attached to ventilators, and far from the arms of their loved ones.

Saying that we're Haitians might also have been an acknowledgment of our past collisions with microbes. In the early nineteen-eighties, the Centers for Disease Control named four groups at "high risk" for acquired-immunodeficiency syndrome: intravenous-drug users, homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and Haitians. Haitians were the only ones solely identified by nationality, in part because of

MADRID, SPAIN, BY ANA GALVAÑ

GUANGZHOU, CHINA, BY JUN CEN

a number of Haitian patients at Jackson Memorial Hospital, in Miami. In October, 2010, nine months after a magnitude-7.0 earthquake struck Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas, Nepalese U.N. peacekeepers stationed in the north of Haiti released raw sewage from their base into one of Haiti's most used rivers, causing a cholera epidemic that killed ten thousand people and infected close to a million. As of this writing, Haiti has had only fifteen confirmed cases of COVID-19, but, fearing that the disease could ravage the country and its fragile health infrastructure, Haiti's President, Jovenel Moïse, declared a state of emergency, imposed curfews, and closed schools and airports.

During the weeks before Haiti had any COVID-19 cases, friends and family members there would text and WhatsApp-message me and others to tell us to watch out for the disease. It was a reversal of sorts, in which our fragility now seemed greater than theirs. They'd had more experience with day-to-day disruptions, including months-long lockdowns due to political protests. This, too, will pass, one poetic cousin, a fellow sunset lover, kept writing, increasingly concerned about me as the death numbers rose in Florida. "I hope you and your husband and your children will live a long life. I hope when you finally die at a very old age, they'll say you had eaten a lot of salt."

"Or had seen a lot of sunsets," I replied.

When I first moved to Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood, in 2002, I would often hear my neighbors say, "Whenever Haiti sneezes, Miami catches a cold." That is, whatever was happening in Haiti could have ripple effects in Miami homes, workplaces, schools, barbershops, and churches. The reverse is also true. Already, hundreds of Miami Haitians, like many other Caribbean and Latin-American immigrants who work in the tourism, hospitality, and service industries here, have lost their jobs owing to COVID-19. Not only will they have trouble providing for themselves; they will also be unable to send money back home to those who count on them to survive. And Miami is home to a large number of Haitian-American medical personnel, who could become ill as the pandemic spreads.

The ripple effect of lost wages, and, even worse, lost lives, in immigrant communities will gravely affect the economies of our neighboring countries, according to Marleine Bastien, the executive director of Family Action Network Movement, a community organization that works with low-income families. Bastien and her staff were forced to temporarily close their offices, but their mostly elderly clients kept showing up to ask for help. She has been trying to work out a system for her center's case managers, mental-health professionals, and paralegals to provide services by phone or on WhatsApp. "Poor immigrant communities already have a great deal of need," she says. "This crisis will only multiply the need."

Complicating matters is the Trump Administration's recent Public Charge rule, which can lead to green cards being denied to people seeking and receiving public benefits. Cheryl Little, the ex-

ecutive director of Americans for Immigrant Justice, a nonprofit law firm in Miami, is also worried about how COVID-19 will affect vulnerable immigrants, particularly those in detention. "Misinformation, xenophobia and panic have been running rampant in the wake of this pandemic," she wrote in a letter to her organization's supporters. "Detained children and adults in crowded facilities have limited control over their access to hygiene and adequate health care. Many of our clients are immunocompromised. People who are detained are packed in like sardines in these places, which are petri dishes for the virus," she told me. "We have countries that have now closed their borders and are refusing to take deportees, which means that people will simply languish in detention and continually be vulnerable to the virus."

One thing that this virus has shown is that, when anyplace in the world sneezes, any one of us can catch a cold, and a deadly one. I am still amazed at how quickly everything has changed since that memorial service, just a few weeks ago. Our friend had lived a long and beautiful life. He'd suffered some, but he had also experienced a great deal of joy. He had eaten a lot of salt, as my cousin would say. Now I find myself hoping that my neighbors, my friends and family members, my children, all of us will get to eat just a little bit more salt, and not suffer too much while doing it.

I remember telling a friend at the memorial service how I was planning to be in Chile this week, with my family, to launch the Spanish edition of one of my books and to visit some members of the Haitian community there. My oldest daughter would be turning fifteen while we were in Santiago, and, because her birthday often falls during spring break, she's come to see these purposely timed work trips as special excursions for her. This week, while we were observing Miami's stay-at-home order, I asked my daughter what she wanted to do for her birthday, and she said that, just as we had done a few times before, she wanted to drive someplace pretty to see a beautiful sunset. Maybe next year we will be able to do that.

—Edwidge Danticat

HUMANISM, REMOTE

I skipped the Literary Arts departmental meeting of Monday, March 9th, and I shouldn't have. Item seven on our agenda, "COVID-19," suddenly became item No. 1, and the upshot, as I soon learned, was that we, the teachers of creative writing at Brown University, were now to begin the process of teaching writing "remotely," meaning, as we all have come to know, via Zoom, or Google Hangouts, or Canvas, or Whereby, or Slack, or Padlet, or similar platforms.

How I felt about this suggestion of "remote learning" was: *what a mess*. I teach primarily undergraduates, and all I could think about was the graduating seniors, and the hellish last semester they were going to have, panicky, trapped at home, mitigated in their independence, likely to go without a graduation ceremony, and stuck in a little video postage stamp for hours a day. They were enrolled at a great university, but would not be able to make use of it, not the libraries, not the common rooms, not the rehearsal studios, not the laboratories. And close behind this initial feeling was anxiety about the product itself, the online product that I was about to be selling to the students, a product that was hard to believe would not be inferior.

A frequently repeated theoretical position in my creative-writing classes is: Literature is a humanist form. This idea is not only so old-fashioned as to be baldly quaint at Brown, like a beverage in lead-lined pewter; it is also sometimes considered just plain wrong. Many a student has cast a jaundiced eye upon the very conception of humanism.

But humanism is exactly why, in my view, a classroom with human bodies in it, struggling over the meaning of a short story, works. Because the literary arts are not the same as the study of economics or astrophysics. The literary arts are about emotions and human consciousness, and so the instruction can't be converted into data points. The literary arts are more about a human in the room feeling something, expressing it, and the other humans listening, and, ideally, feeling similarly. Such is the invention of compassion. Our instruction is not only about dispensing information; it is also about bearing witness, grappling with the complexities of another.

But Zoom and its shortcomings hurtled down upon the LitArts program, like every other on College Hill, and there was nothing left to do but learn how to use this interface, to try to cause the humanness to shine through the ones and zeroes. I shared the news with my students, bumped elbows with them one last time. And then they were gone.

I posted a call for Zoom help on Facebook, where I learned about "sharing your screen," "breakout groups," and "asynchronous teaching," for the kids who are taking my course from Mumbai and Singapore, and who won't reliably be able to stay up until two in the morning for class. It turns out that many of my friends have taught digitally for years, in community and prison workshops, through public libraries and Y.M.C.A.s, and their students have become stronger writers, have learned, and grown.

Remote learning may be the only feasible way to instruct in this lethal time, but that doesn't mean remote learning represents the best idea in humanist education, or that it is anything like the long-standing model of the liberal arts, a two-thousand-year-old idea of teaching that may be the basis for the university itself. What we are selling now is a hastily arranged experiment. And it's easy to grieve over that. But what we cannot give up on, in our grief, is the students themselves, at home, panicking, and soon to be found in the video postage stamp on Zoom or Slack or Canvas or Hangouts. I know I can still explain split infinitives to them, no matter what. Now, if I can just figure out how to call through the wireless networking to their hearts.

—Rick Moody

EIGHTYISH

One measure of my simmering, socially distant derangement is this: after many days at home, I have discovered how much I like to say the word "Fauci." I walk around my apartment after the President's press conferences, chanting it like an efficient mantra, or

a Dada acting exercise. "Fauci. Fauci? Faucifaucifaucifauci. Fauci!" The surname belongs, of course, to Anthony Fauci, the elfin, permanently smirking immunologist who directs the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and who has become an important player in the Trump Administration's farcical grapplings with COVID-19. His obvious competency would be comforting if his boss weren't his own kind of communicable plague.

For me, the syllables have come untethered from the personality. *Fauci.* I'm not so much restless, or bored, as trying to ward off horror by submitting my smallest thoughts to a kind of deep-sea gigantism—that weird process by which creatures closer to the ocean floor grow fearsomely huge.

On Wednesdays—only three so far, but rituals tend to stick—I video-chat with a group of my high-school friends. At the beginning of each call, we take turns ranking how distressed we are, on a scale of one to a hundred. (The standard one to ten had insufficient texture, we figured out early on.) Last week, one buddy showed up in a tuxedo, as a gag. He wore the pleated pants and everything—sipped on his vodka looking like a cloistered first violinist.

I admitted that I'd been "eightyish," and ran down my list of complaints. I miss the subway, toward which I haven't felt any special romance since high school. I miss airplanes, which terrify me. I miss the Upper West Side, where I spent my high-school years, and where my mother still lives. I worry about my daughter, who's holed up with her mom. I worry about my mother, who lives alone. I worry about my wife, who lives with me. I miss church, although the last time I participated in the "sign of peace"—the part where everybody shakes hands—I refused to even look at my right hand until I got home and could wash it.

The other sound that rings in my ears, embarrassed as I am to admit it, is *Trump*. Whenever I try to talk about him, about how his addled response to our crisis will surely lead to death, about how quick he is to lie and how slow he is to comprehend, the space between my eyes starts to tingle and my nose goes numb. CNN is all but abolished in our home. Instead, I read books and listen to the pigeons who hold meetings atop the air-conditioning unit outside our bedroom window. So far, they don't seem to notice a difference.

A few days ago, I walked around the corner to the liquor store. This was before the full urban-surgeon look—mask and brightly colored gloves—had made its way to Flatbush, where I live. Just outside my building, a woman saw my getup and shouted out, more to herself and the others on the sidewalk than to me, "That's right! Ha-*ha!* You ain't fucking playing!" I felt a bit silly, but left my mask on. Every time I breathed, a bit of steam escaped and fogged the lenses of my glasses.

Later that afternoon, I think, although it might have been the next day, I walked with my wife down Flatbush Avenue, toward her mom's house, where we'd pick up some packages and wave hello. It's normally a twenty-five-minute walk, but now it seemed interminable. Walking outside these days requires too much geometry, too much spatial intelligence. Older men, apparently untroubled by the dictates of distancing, were seated, as they always are, at folding tables and on the hoods of sedans. They played cards, made jokes, drank from Styrofoam cups, blasted music. I toggled swiftly between annoyance at how they clogged the sidewalk, concern for their health, and then—probably foremost—envy at what looked like a good time. We took sweeping, parabolic detours around their tight huddles, sometimes slipping between parked cars and walking in the street. One persistent, petty worry is how much of a dweeb I feel like when I'm thinking about infectious disease.

Outside, I imagine that each stranger's head is crowned by a saint's halo of fatal droplets, waiting to surf on one of my breaths into my body and cut through my lungs like a spray of glass. I keep thinking about the last party I went to, a month ago: a small affair, over dinner, in Harlem. We sat suitably separated around the table, trading elbow bumps, knowing that this was a last hurrah.

On the walk, as the sun began to set, we passed a small storefront with a cheap-looking banner across its front, which read "In Search of Shalom." In a window was a smaller sign that said "Shalom in real life: Is it possible?" Both advertised a Web site, insearchofshalom.com. I visited the site later; its contents are strangely vague—as far as I can tell, it's for a branch of Jews for Jesus. But the question on the little sign keeps coming back to me. If real peace is indeed possible—either the inner kind that casts out anxiety or the interpersonal kind that produces worthy politics—I suspect we'll find out very soon.

—Vinson Cunningham

FLIGHT HOME

On January 31st, my mother texted the group. My uncle replied, and then my aunt, my cousin, my mother again, my uncle, my aunt. My aunt is a nurse. She types very fast and sometimes I wake up to twenty, thirty text boxes from her. I did not reply immediately because I was still reading the cycle of chats from earlier. My father did not reply because typing Chinese tires him out. My grandmother finally replied to say that panicking was useless—Delta had cancelled her flight from Detroit to Shanghai, so we would just have to rebook. China Eastern was still flying out and we got her on the next available flight, on March 30th, a month later than planned. My parents live in Detroit and my grandmother was visiting them. She lives in Nanjing. My uncle and aunt live in Nanjing. My cousin lives in Shanghai. I live in New York.

The new flight was to leave from J.F.K. and my grandmother is eighty-seven. She is alert, funny and sardonic, a retired city architect and a longtime professor in the field. But her head can tilt while she talks. She is hard of hearing and unsteady on stairs. She has hypertension, arthritis, insomnia. My parents planned to drive her from Detroit to New York, where we would see her off. Privately, my mother asked me to find my grandmother a face mask.

I asked my closest college friend, a doctor. She had been packing all month to move into a condo that she and her husband bought. He broke his leg on a ski trip and couldn't help. The week of their move, because of firmer social-distancing measures, the condo board asked them to wait. Unfortunately, they could not—new tenants were about to move into their rental. At a large hos-

BERLIN, GERMANY, BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

pital in New York, my friend was preparing three floors for COVID-19, eight I.C.U.s in total, where she predicts that supplies will become scarce. She put the face mask for my grandmother in a floral gift bag and left it with her doorman. In the bag was also a tin of hot-chocolate mix.

Who would believe this? I ask my fiction class, now online, to consider the credibility of events and what a reader will accept.

Not so long ago, I studied epidemiology. For my doctorate, I had been trained in chronic-disease epidemiology, but infectious-disease data are not unfamiliar. I.D. epidemiology starts with models, moving people from bins of susceptible (S) to infected (I) to recovered (R) and, potentially, back to bin S. The true flow rates between these bins are still unknown—and probably vary by country, by health system, and by speed of preventive response—which explains why current predictions have such a huge range for the coronavirus. Under the subject line "crazy times," my doctoral adviser and I have been e-mailing. He has two teen-age kids, both now home from school. He believes that a concept should never be so complex that he cannot explain it to them. To simplify details, the key word is "exponential." Exponential growth and impact.

In January and February, my uncle sent us a daily ticker count of the number of cases in China and the number of deaths. The count window had a calming blue border and a white typeface. In March, he began sending a ticker count for Europe and the U.S. By the numbers, China is now safer than most of the world. But the country is trying to fend off a second wave, and this comes at a cost for its citizens abroad.

It took my entire family several days to figure out "the procedure." After landing in Shanghai, my grandmother would wait in a multi-hour screening line to receive a green, red, or yellow card. Coming from New York, she would almost certainly receive a yellow one. I think of soccer, which my grandmother likes to watch. She sits formally and with her arms crossed. When the ball is passed well, she lifts her arms up an inch and says "good ball, good ball." From Shanghai, she would board a bus to Kunshan, where Jiangsu authorities will screen her again. Then another bus to Nanjing, where she will be quarantined at home for two weeks. On the first and the last days, a health worker will come to check her temperature. My uncle will be allowed to deliver food, but only to the doorstep. The door cannot be opened.

On March 25th, the flight was cancelled, as were most April flights to China, and my grandmother is still waiting to be rebooked. Once her visa expires, she will have trouble reapplying for another, which will make it hard for her to visit us again in the future, so most likely she won't. I am looking into what we can do about her pills. Her doctors are in China. Will she be able to see one here?

Epidemiologists follow populations. We study how large groups funnel from unexposed to exposed, from control to case. The larger the sample, the higher the case number. The higher the case number, the more precise the results. We do not think in terms of anecdotes or individuals. At the individual level, statistics break down. But my grandmother is part of a statistic. She is one

of many people in the large bin of S, and if she moves into I she becomes an anecdote.

—Weike Wang

TRUMP'S MEASURES

"I like the numbers being where they are." This was Donald Trump's justification for attempting to prevent the Grand Princess passengers from disembarking on American soil. (He made the statement on March 6th, a hundred years ago.) I can't not hear it as a line of poetry. After all, it scans—five alternating stresses, a line of pentameter. And the prosody entangles the statement in my mind with the history of verse, especially since, from antiquity until the early nineteenth century, "numbers" meant poetic meter, the number of syllables or stresses in a line. "Numbers" denoted orders beyond the poetic, too; it named the harmony of the universe. "All is numbers," the Pythagoreans claimed; Trump's raising the question of numbers sounds like part of an ancient debate. Alexander Pope: "But most by numbers judge a poet's song; / And smooth or rough, with them is right or wrong."

Trump-speak has always been a radically rough and wrong kind of poetry. The line that's haunting me sounds traditional, but usually Trump is avant-garde: his non sequiturs, his use of disjunction, his mangling of syntax can make his rallies resemble nightmarish (and much more crowded) versions of poetry readings I've attended in which nonlinear language is conceived of as an attack on the smooth functioning of bourgeois political rhetoric. (Those were the days.) Trump campaigned in this pseudo-poetry, and he fails to govern in it, too, using language that intends to inflame or obscure but almost never refers to anything real. Like many poets, he conflates beauty and truth: We're going to have a beautiful wall. Beautiful (Confederate) statues. Beautiful rallies (despite the virus). He has said that he's "automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them . . ." He likes the numbers being where they are. Melania is a 10.

On the one hand, an (unintentional) evocation of a poetic lineage. On the other, the language of a gambler: I like the six; I like those odds; I like the Lakers against the Clippers; I like mid-cap consumer goods. What makes Trump's line compelling as poetry is how it sounds at once like Wallace Stevens and a bookie.

Plato warned us against poets. I'm not sure I fully understand his arguments for deporting them from the Republic, but now I'm sobered by this statement of his about numbers: "The property of numbers appears to have the power of leading us towards reality. . . . The soldier must learn them in order to marshal his troops; the philosopher, because he must rise above the world of change and grasp true being, or he will never become proficient in the calculation of reason. Our guardian is both soldier and philosopher."

Our guardian in the White House is neither; he's just a failed poet like me, unable to marshal the troops to build the new hospitals, to manufacture ventilators. He wants to protect the numbers, not the humans they are supposed to denote. The grownups and the posters used to say, Don't be a statistic. That meant don't get shot or O.D., but for Trump it means: die without being counted, and without counting. He likes the numbers being where they are.

How to end on a note of optimism, however frightened and furious I am? Iamb: an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, the sound of a heartbeat, the oldest number, an embodied rhythm held in common, a force bigger than any tyrant or fool, a collective pulse that beats beneath his sophistry.

—Ben Lerner

AVENUE OF SUPERFLUITIES

Regent Street, in central London, is a sweeping boulevard laid out by the architect John Nash at the request of his close friend and client the Prince Regent, later King George IV. Nash, who had made his name building country houses for aristocrats, was a Georgian-era precursor of New York's Robert Moses: a town planner who sought to separate the poorer, more squalid eastern side of London from its newer, grander, wealthier west. Nash's instrument for dividing London was Regent Street, a wide concourse devoted to luxury shopping. The journalist George Augustus Sala described it in 1858 as "an avenue of superfluities—a great trunk road in Vanity Fair." When the street celebrated its two-hundredth anniversary, last year, superfluities were still abundantly represented among the retailers that could afford its rents: Coach, Burberry, Lululemon, Apple.

Apple was the first to close voluntarily. It did so on March 14th, when the company announced that all its retail stores worldwide, outside of those in China, would temporarily cease operations—displays of devices designed to invite touching having been alarmingly rebranded as possible vectors of contagion. When I rode my bike down Regent Street's dramatic curve on the afternoon of Sunday, March 22nd, all the stores were shuttered. Apart from a couple of guys in track pants eying the Rolex display at Mappin & Webb, the upscale jewelry store, the sidewalks were empty. We're accustomed to reach for the phrase "post-apocalyptic" to describe an urban landscape devoid of life, and the Christian preacher with the microphone and the amp who was haranguing an almost deserted Piccadilly Circus added to the dystopian atmosphere. But what the streets really recalled were images of London during the economic crisis of the nineteen-seventies, when Prime Minister Edward Heath imposed a three-day week to conserve fuel, and power cuts regularly dimmed even the busiest thoroughfares. Now the city looks not so much post-apocalyptic as post-capitalist, as if the fever of consumption that has come to characterize the metropolis had finally burned itself out.

That Sunday ended a weekend that was a turning point for London. Schools closed on Friday afternoon, remaining open only for the children of "key workers": nurses, police, supermarket staff. Students in the equivalent of the tenth and twelfth grades, who had been expecting in summer term to sit an intense sequence of exams, for which they have been preparing for two years, were informed that exams were cancelled, and they'd be assessed by their teachers and mock-exam results instead. "She feels like she's been fired," the father of a devastated sixteen-year-old girl told me. Public transport had already contracted. On Friday evening, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, appeared at the government's now daily press conference to announce that cafés, bars, restau-

rants, and night clubs should close that evening and not reopen the next day. Johnson longs to be liked; his default manner is a blithe fulsomeness, which even in the current crisis he has had trouble shedding. "We're taking away the ancient, inalienable right of free-born people of the United Kingdom to go to the pub," he said, as if delivering the news with a jovial dig in the ribs. (A week later, Johnson released a self-recorded video in which he announced that he had tested positive for the coronavirus, and was in isolation at 10 Downing Street.) In contrast, Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, appeared statesmanlike when, in the same press conference, he announced that the government would pay eighty per cent of the salaries of workers put on furlough because of the virus, up to twenty-five hundred pounds a month. Within days, the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, effectively nationalized Britain's railways, to prevent the private companies that run them from collapsing. Having celebrated a landslide victory in the elections last December, the Conservative Party may end up introducing the most socialist policies Britain has seen in decades.

Beyond Regent Street, London's theatre district, around Leicester Square, was empty. Earlier in the week, Johnson had called on the public to avoid theatres and cinemas, but stopped short of ordering them shut, angering venue operators who would thereby be deprived of possible insurance payouts to cover their losses. By Friday, the order to close had come. Farther north, ambulances with wailing sirens headed to University College Hospital, on the Euston Road, while nearby Harley Street, famous for its private medical clinics, was deserted. On Saturday, the government announced that a deal had been struck with Britain's private-hospital sector, making an extra twenty thousand staff, eight thousand hospital beds, and twelve hundred ventilators available.

I passed an ambulance parked on the street outside a block of housing for elderly people, its doors open and its stretcher readied for use. Across the street lay the green expanse of Primrose Hill, one of London's loveliest parks. It was Mothering Sunday, and, while the Prime Minister had urged citizens to call their mothers and not to visit them, earlier in the week he had reassured Londoners that going outside for fresh air was still something they could do. As a result, the parks seemed hardly less crowded than they would have been on any other bright spring day; walkers and joggers on narrow paths observed social distancing only up to the point of mathematical possibility. On either side of Regent's Park Road, a pretty street of upscale boutiques and restaurants, rival florists were open, their storefronts bursting with bouquets, as if for a wedding, or a funeral.

—Rebecca Mead

THE FRONT LINES

Maybe five weeks back, a friend living in Tokyo hit me up online about groceries. This was after the first confirmed coronavirus case in the States, but before the inertia of global inevitability we're all stuck in now. He said I needed to stock up on Tylenol and rice, and whatever the hell else I needed to make myself comfortable indoors, without restaurants, for an extended period of time. When I asked why, he sent a link detailing the virus's spread from metropolis to metropolis. Then he sent six more.

"You don't want to be sick going to the grocer's," he said. "And you don't want to be fucking around at the grocery store if you aren't sick."

In Houston, preparation is tied to the city's topography. Harris County's share of upper- and lowercase storms in the past few decades has produced a reliable equation: if there's even a whiff of an emergency on the horizon, our grocery stores begin to fill. The shoppers tend to move in waves: there's your First Wave, folks who just triple up on everything, because they're older or they're preppers or they're refugees, or maybe they've just seen some shit in their lifetimes. Then there's the Second Wave, folks who surface after the plausibility of an emergency coalesces (more folks of color). There's the Third Wave, once the emergency becomes imminent (the stores get crowded), and then the Fourth Wave, after city officials legitimatize the Bad Thing. That's when you end up texting in line, hunched over your cart for hours.

So that weekend, just before everything started getting cancelled, my boyfriend and I made our rounds around town. First, to El Ahorro Supermarket and Fiesta Mart, for beans and eggs and tortillas and paper towels. We hit Phoenicia Specialty Foods, a Mediterranean grocery on Westheimer Road, whose shoppers piled carts with pita, garlic, and lamb. Then we went to a Super H Mart, just outside the city's inner loop, for face cleanser and chicken and shrimp, and then to another H Mart, in Bellaire's Chinatown, near where I live, for everything else. We found shelves full of chili oil and Clorox wipes and curry blocks. It only took a few hours.

In line, at one point, I asked the register guy if they had any Tylenol, and he tossed two boxes into my basket. When I asked if they had any face masks, he laughed. "How about *you* tell *me* where you find some," he said.

Watching the shelves empty all over America on Twitter and Instagram, you'd think everyone in this country only shopped at Sprouts or Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. But Houston is diverse, and its grocery stores reflect that. We've got loads of little markets catering to their respective communities, and folks in parallel communities pass through them routinely: African markets in the corners of strip malls, sprawling Asian markets, Latinx groceries in clusters. They carry the staples for their respective flavor profiles (furikake, Scotch-bonnet peppers, ancho chilies, and thirty-four varieties of doenjang), but they sell basics, too. If you can't find toilet paper at Seiwa Market, chances are you can find it at Karibu Mini Mart or Viet Hoa International Foods. And if they don't have it then there really is a problem.

Two weeks later, as the work-from-home decrees came down, and I started missing a spice here or a morning croissant there, I popped by my neighborhood grocers to stock up. I could tell that things were starting to get strange. But, for most of my local stores, business went on as usual. In a market tucked inside the Hong Kong City Mall, lines weren't any longer than usual. Families stalked the produce aisles, fingering cilantro and scallions (scarcities elsewhere), juggling cannisters of Lysol wipes and packages of flour (which had disappeared throughout the city). Every fourth shopper wore a mask. Every other shopper wore a pair of gloves.

At H Mart, I grabbed a bottle of

BELGRADE, SERBIA, BY JASU HU

citron tea by the register and was weighing whether it was worth five bucks when the woman behind me asked if I wanted to trade it for ginger-lemon. I looked hesitant, but the dude behind the counter wiped both bottles down and handed them back between gloved fingers.

These grocers had—right along with their counterparts in emergency services—helped keep their cities running. But once I got outside, walking to my car, a white guy behind me yelled a loud "Hey!" I turned, thinking he was talking to me. But the target of his anger was an Asian woman halfway across the parking lot. He yelled "Hey!" again, fuming, pointing to an abandoned shopping cart. He seemed, for some reason, to think she had left it there. He asked the woman what the fuck she thought she was doing.

The woman and I exchanged looks. I walked over and moved the cart, waving her away. The guy gave me a long stare and climbed into his truck. Two kids sat in the back seat, blinking through the windows.

Last month, the mayor issued a stay-at-home order, signalling that we'd be navigating this situation, together, for some time. But the burden is not distributed equally: besides nurses and doctors, caregivers and delivery people, grocers are on the front lines. They don't get to work from home. God forbid that we're anything but grateful.

I ventured into a decimated Whole Foods the other day and managed to snag the last pecan pie. At the register, I asked the cashier, a Latinx dude, how it was going. He looked sleepy. But he smiled, and said that the day had been chaos. "We'll be fine," he said. "We've got this. But it's gonna fucking suck."

—Bryan Washington

MUSIC WILL BE IMPORTANT

We're all going to be spending some time alone now. I once spent the better part of a year by myself in my apartment. It was 2016. I was not under house arrest. I was not in quarantine. I was sick with what we and our doctors call major depression. I would rather call it suicide, which I see not as an event or a deed, not a consequence of anguish or deliberations over the meaning of life, but as the natural ongoing outcome of trauma and isolation. And though at times I functioned, I nonetheless could not bring myself to write, or read much, or cook for myself, or exercise, or open the mailbox. I let the mail sit, until the mailman, unable to fit all the flyers and bills and tax notices, emptied the box, wrapped everything with a rubber band, and left the bundle on the entryway floor. Those were bad days, when I made it outside and into the neighborhood—the days when, on my way out the building's front door, I found that mail. The problem was terror. The problem was that I was not safe. There was danger. I'd lost my sense of belonging, and lived in abjection, lonely, cut off, trying not to die but working just to stay alive. Fear and loneliness can both seem to last an eternity. Maybe at some time in your life you've hidden yourself away, scurried past the mailbox, let the phone ring, if it rings at all. Maybe you've distanced yourself from friends, or lost them for good. What will happen to you if you go outside? I put the mail in the back of the closet, and then took an Ativan.

And yet I needed people's voices. I

LONDON, ENGLAND, BY BILL BRAGG

needed to see faces, to look into another's eyes, to hold someone's hand.

We like to say that we are wired, as if we are computers or electrical grids. My wiring is shot; she needs recharging; he's in shutdown mode; you have power. We say that music soothes the savage beast. The expression is a misquote from the English Restoration playwright William Congreve, who in fact writes of the savage breast, not beast. "Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast, To soften Rocks, or bend a knotted Oak." A savage breast is what we feel when we are alone too long.

My apartment faces south. There is a tree outside the living-room windows, and across the way are brownstones in a line, painted blue and red and pale yellow. On sunny days, the living room is filled with light. In spring and summer, with the windows open, you can hear the birds. The year that I was alone, I sat on the sofa and listened to the music that had mattered to me when I was young, Steppenwolf and Pink Floyd and Black Sabbath. I put on the music that I came to later in life, jazz, and electronic and experimental music; and Bartók and Mozart and Bach.

Sitting in my apartment in Brooklyn, that year when I couldn't easily leave the house, I listened. I was always shaking and hyperventilating. I felt my body pressed down, as if by some weight that I could not see. It was a feeling of being crushed from every side. Maybe you've felt this. Maybe you've felt that you cannot stand straight, or make a smile. Sometimes I got up from the sofa and paced, but then I might stop to adjust the speakers, angle them a little. In? Out? Was I sitting the right distance away? I put my gear on platforms made to dampen vibration, and added big fat speaker cables. The music seemed incrementally to soften, and, as I fiddled with the system, it came to sound, to feel, more and more close. That's how I think of it now: listening as intimacy. My shoulders dropped. The muscles in my neck and face relaxed. I breathed more deeply. I prayed and I wept. I stood at the window and watched the people on the sidewalk below, parents with children, groups of friends, neighbors bringing home groceries. I thought of all of us who, like me at that time, lived in danger and in fear, a fear that might seem inexplicable, yet also concrete and real. Who hides behind the curtain in the window across the street? And what about over there, or down the street? How many of us might we find on the block, the avenue, the neighborhood, the city, the land? How many of us were afraid to live, afraid to die? Dear God, take care of my brothers and sisters. Take care of our families. Take care of the people in hospitals and on the streets. Take care of our doctors and nurses. Take care of our war veterans. I was never a soldier, never went off to fight, but all through that year I cried for the veterans. They return home wounded.

I put on my records and prayed. I was, we could say, sitting in music. I wasn't wired. I was wire. The sound waves were wire, and the air in the room was wire, and the walls were wire, and the books in their shelves were wire, and my body was wire. I found my communion with others who were alone. And I might notice, when I felt you near me, that I was tapping my foot, and that my thoughts were, for the moment, clear, and that I could smile, a bit.

—Donald Antrim

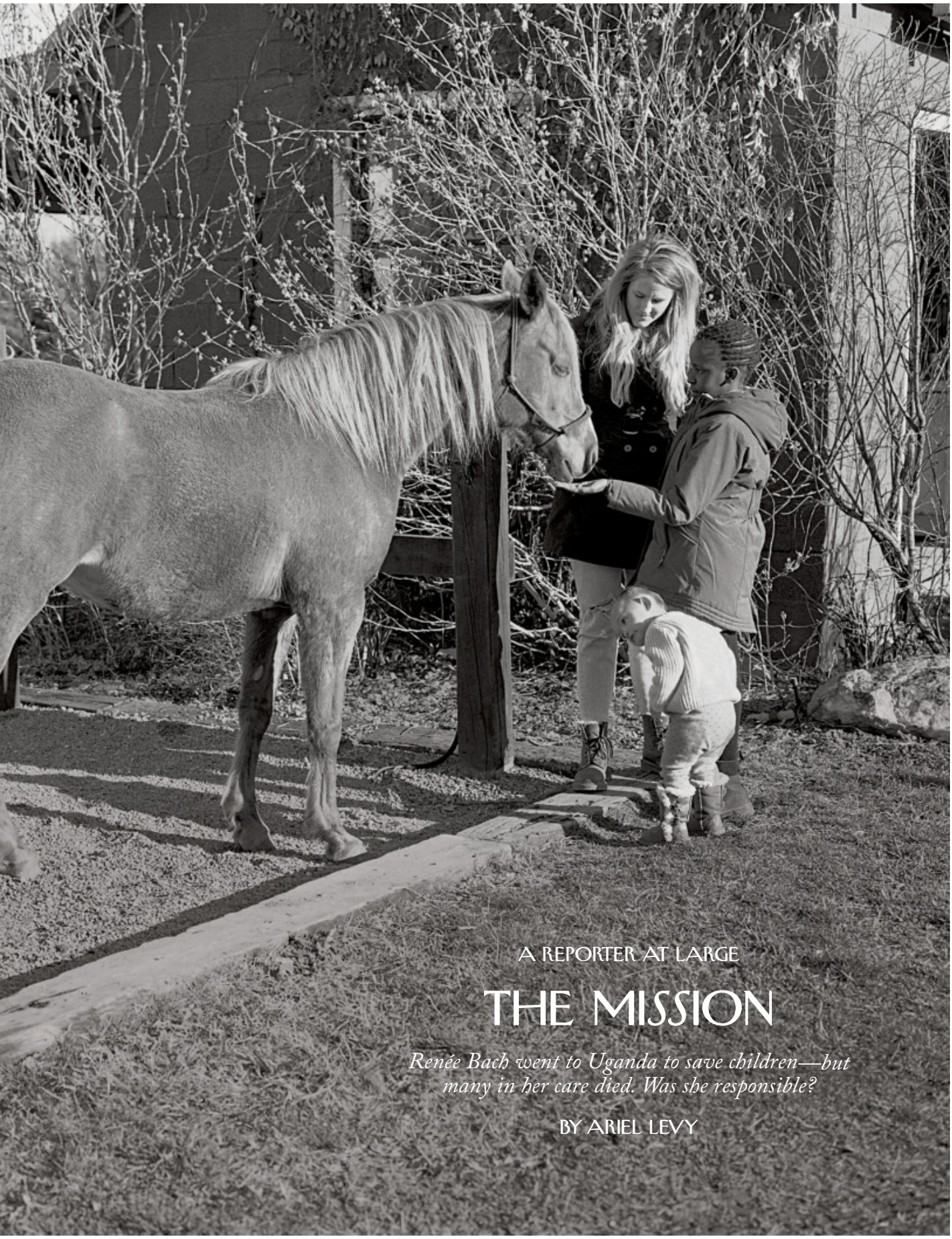
In the summer of 2013, Ziria Namutamba heard that there was a missionary health facility a few hours from her village, in southeastern Uganda, where a white doctor was treating children. She decided to go there with her grandson Twalali Kifabi, who was unwell. At three, he weighed as much as an average four-month-old. His head looked massive above his emaciated limbs; his abdomen and feet were swollen like water balloons. All over his tiny body, patches of darkened skin were peeling off. At a rural clinic six months earlier, he had been diagnosed as having malnutrition, but the family couldn't afford the foods that were recommended. Twalali was his mother's sixth child, and she was pregnant again—too far along to accompany him to the missionary facility, which was called Serving His Children.

"We were received by a white woman, later known to me as 'aunt Renee,'" Namutamba attested in an affidavit, which she signed with her thumbprint, in 2019. At Serving His Children, Namutamba "saw the same woman inject something on the late Twalali's head, she connected tubes and wires from baby Twalali to a machine." Days later, while Namutamba was doing laundry in the clinic's courtyard, she overheard another woman saying, "What a pity her child has died." Soon, the person called Aunt Renée "came downstairs holding Twalali's lifeless body, wrapped in white clothes."

Twalali was one of more than a hundred babies who died at Serving His Children between 2010 and 2015. The facility began not as a registered health clinic but as the home of Renée Bach—who was not a doctor but a homeschooled missionary, and who had arrived in Uganda at the age of nineteen and started an N.G.O. with money raised through her church in Bedford, Virginia. She'd felt called to Africa to help the needy, and she believed that it was Jesus' will for her to treat malnourished children. Bach told their stories on a blog that she started. "I hooked the baby up to oxygen and got to work," she wrote in 2011. "I took her temperature, started an IV, checked her blood sugar, tested for malaria, and looked at her HB count."

In January, 2019, that blog post was submitted as evidence in a lawsuit filed against Bach and Serving His Children in Ugandan civil court. The suit, led by

"My desire to go to Uganda was to help people and to serve," Bach said. Last summer,



A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE MISSION

Renée Bach went to Uganda to save children—but many in her care died. Was she responsible?

BY ARIEL LEVY

as accusations against her led to a lawsuit and to death threats, she moved home, to Bedford, Virginia.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK STEINMETZ

a newly founded legal nonprofit called the Women's Probono Initiative, lists the mothers of Twalali and another baby as plaintiffs, and includes affidavits from former employees of S.H.C. A gardener who worked there for three years asserts that Bach posed as a doctor: "She dressed in a clinical coat, often had a stethoscope around her neck, and on a daily basis I would see her medicating children." An American nurse who volunteered at S.H.C. states that Bach "felt God would tell her what to do for a child." A Ugandan driver says that, for eight years, "on average I would drive at least seven to ten dead bodies of children back to their villages each week."

The story became an international sensation. "How could a young American with no medical training even contemplate caring for critically ill children in a foreign country?" NPR asked last August. The *Guardian* pointed to a "growing unease about the behavior of so-called 'white saviors' in Africa." A headline in the Atlanta *Black Star* charged Bach with " 'Playing Doctor' for Years in Uganda." The local news in Virginia reported that Bach was accused of actions "leading to the deaths of hundreds of children."

Bach made only one televised appearance in response, on Fox News. Wearing a puffy cream-colored blouse, with her blond hair half up, she was pictured on a split screen with her attorney David Gibbs, who previously led the effort to keep Terri Schiavo on life support, and now runs the National Center for Life and Liberty, a "legal ministry" that advocates for Christian causes. Over the years, Bach said, she had assisted Ugandan doctors and nurses employed by her organization in "emergency settings and in crisis situations," but had never practiced medicine or "represented myself as a medical professional." Bach sounded nervous, but she firmly denied the "tough allegation" against her. She had used the first person on her blog as an act of creative license, because a simple narrative appealed to donors; in fact, she'd had a Ugandan medical team by her side at all times. "I was a young American woman boarding a plane to Africa," she said—inexperienced and idealistic, working on an intractable problem. "My desire to go to Uganda was to help people and to serve."

This winter, Bach stood on Main Street in Bedford, Virginia, watching the Christmas parade with her parents and her two daughters, one-year-old Zuriah and ten-year-old Selah. The sidewalks were crowded with people wearing jeans and Carhartt work clothes, some sitting on folding chairs with coolers they'd packed for the occasion. Garlands and wreaths hung from the street lights, in front of two-story brick storefronts climbing a hill.

Selah, whom Bach adopted after she was brought into Serving His Children as a malnourished infant, had a scarf wrapped around her neck and wore her hair in long, neat braids. She waved at a neighbor, who was inching up the parade path behind the wheel of a vintage fire truck. "I know him!" she said, radiant with excitement. He smiled and threw her a handful of candy canes.

The elementary-school band marched by, playing a clamorous carol, followed by a Mrs. Claus on a giant tractor. The next parade participants were on foot: the Sons of Confederate Veterans, wearing Civil War uniforms and carrying Confederate flags. "It's pretty conservative for me here, and it's not very diverse," Bach said quietly. She had not intended to move back to Bedford, but she'd left Uganda in a rush last summer; after the accusations against her spread, she'd started receiving death threats.

Bedford is a town of sixty-five hundred, but it feels even smaller. "It's still a farming community, though that's not the primary occupation of most people anymore," Bach's mother, Lauri, said. Lauri and her husband, Marcus, a trim man with a gray beard, ran an equine-therapy program out of their barn while their children were growing up. Neither of them had ever been outside the United States when Renée told them she was moving to Africa, but they weren't worried. "We raised our children to be world-changers and to be risktakers," Lauri, who has been the U.S. director of Serving His Children since 2013, said. "I felt like, if she's doing what God calls her to do, she'd be safer walking alone in a village in Uganda than driving to the Bedford Walmart."

As we talked, a float at the top of the hill started slipping backward; the transmission was giving out. A dozen men, including Marcus Bach, raced up and pushed it onto the flat road ahead. "It's just what you do—you go help people," Lauri said. "People *should* be driven to help others. And, in my opinion, they shouldn't be judged for who they try to help."

Before Renée Bach went to Uganda, her aspirations were conventional. "I wanted to get married and have five kids," she told me at her parents' house, as she tried to distract Zuriah with a

"Can you help me bury the groceries all over the neighborhood?"

miniature Santa so that she wouldn't pull ornaments off the tree. "I was a super plain-Jane, straight-up white girl." But, not long after she got her high-school diploma, members of her church told her that an orphanage in Jinja, Uganda, needed volunteers. A town of eighty thousand on the northern edge of Lake Victoria, Jinja is a bustling place, where people sell bananas and backpacks from stalls along red-dirt roads, and hired motorcycles weave around crammed minibuses decorated with pictures of Rambo and Bob Marley. Bach arrived in 2007, joining a large missionary community. "I felt very at home and at peace there," she said. She loved being immersed in a foreign culture and absorbed in her work.

When Bach returned to her parents' house, nine months later, she didn't know what to do with herself: "I was really trying to seek out what school I was going to go to, what career path." Then she had an "almost supernatural experience," she told me. "It became really clear, as if God was, like, 'You're supposed to go back to Uganda.'" She laughed, ruefully. "This sounds like such a white-savior thing to say, but I wanted to try to meet a need that wasn't being met."

Bach decided to start a feeding program, with money raised through her church, offering meals to children in Masese, a neighborhood on the edge of Jinja that she described as "very slumlike" but vibrant. "There were a lot of people from the internally-displaced-persons camps up in the north," she said. "People from a lot of different tribes and clans." Bach needed a headquarters, but she struggled to find a house to rent. "Masese was on the side of a hill, and everyone lived in mud homes—when it rained, all the rain would wash houses away," she told me. "Every person that I contacted, they were all, like, 'Why are you moving there as a single white girl? You're going to get robbed out of your mind!' And I was, like, 'No—I just feel really strongly that's where we're supposed to be.'" Through a friend, she found a sprawling concrete house to rent from a government official who was away in Entebbe, and she started offering free lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She hired a few people to cook, serve food, and help with activities, like craft day and Bible club. By the end of the year, Bach estimates, she was feeding a thousand kids a week.

The recipients of her program contended constantly with illness, but nobody could afford to go to the doctor. In Uganda's public hospitals, patients are frequently expected to pay not only for medicine but also for such basic supplies as rubber gloves and syringes. For many families, even the cost of transport to the hospital was prohibitive. So Bach often drove sick kids to the town's pediatric hospital—which everyone refers to as Nalufenya, for the neighborhood it's in—and paid for their care. "Looking back, that wasn't—well, actually, *nothing* we did then was sustainable," she said. "But it was just a way of being like: I don't know anything about medicine, or health care here—or even about Uganda. But I can pay for your malaria medicine so you don't die."

In the fall of 2009, Bach received a call from a nurse at Nalufenya, who told her that the hospital had some kids it was "refeeding"—bringing back to nutritional health after bouts of severe acute malnutrition. "She said, 'They've been here for a really long time, and they can't pay for their stuff anymore. They're medically stable. Can we send them to your feeding program?'" The hospital promised that a nutritionist would visit every week to check on them. Three toddlers and their guardians came to live with Bach.

Tending to those children opened her eyes to the omnipresence of malnutrition in the area. "It was almost like malnutrition was the stepchild of health care," Bach said. Perhaps, she thought, this was why God had sent her to Uganda. She could care for malnourished children and hire nutritionists to educate their parents, then ask the families to help in her community garden. "They would be giving back to their child's recovery, not just getting a free handout, and learning at the same time!" she posted on her blog.

Bach was astonished by the response. A twelve-year-old came with her infant sister. A neighbor brought in a baby she'd found in a pit latrine; the mother was fifteen years old, dying of H.I.V. and tuberculosis. (That baby was Selah, whom Bach later adopted.) Medical professionals throughout the region quickly realized that Bach had access to resources they didn't. "We were getting referrals from twenty-seven districts—people were travelling for eight or nine hours to get to our center," she said. "We were, like, 'How did you even hear about us?' But, all of a sudden, they're knocking on the door."

Serving His Children registered as an N.G.O. with the Ugandan government, and received a certificate to "carry out its activities in the fields of promoting evangelism; provide welfare for the needy." Bach hired a Ugandan nurse named Constance Alonyo to care for the children, and, as she raised more money from America, she brought in more nurses, nutritionists, and eventually doctors. But she did not get S.H.C. licensed as a health center for nearly four years. Bach insists that this shouldn't have been confusing: "All of our clients signed a release stating, 'I realize that this is not a registered hospital, this is a nutritional-rehabilitation facility.'" The forms were in English, one of more than fifty languages spoken in Uganda. Many of S.H.C.'s clients were illiterate.

Medical supervision was crucial, because treating malnourished children is not a simple matter of providing meals or milk. In a state of severe malnutrition, the body starts to consume itself in order to survive; intracellular enzymes stop functioning properly, and so do major organs. When nutrients are introduced, a huge shift in electrolytes can cause a potentially deadly condition known as refeeding syndrome. In world-class pediatric intensive-care units, physicians closely monitor patients' electrolyte levels and adjust treatment accordingly. Bach, of course, could not provide anywhere near that level of care. But neither could the hospitals that were calling her to take patients. "Tomorrow I am picking up 4 more children from the hospital," Bach blogged in July, 2010. She asked her followers to pray for the children's recovery, adding, "I also ask that you please pray for my sanity."

Bach was overwhelmed by what she'd taken on. She asked around to figure out how to keep medical charts that would be intelligible to staff at Ugandan health facilities. "Everyone would be, like, 'Just

Bach founded her center in 2009 and soon was feeding a thousand children a week.

buy a school notebook and write in it—that's what everyone does.' There were a lot of things like that, where no one had an answer. But, in the beginning, we were just trying to keep our heads above water."

Bach had been raised to believe that Christians have a responsibility to help the needy, and that with tenacity and research ordinary people can achieve most things they set their minds to. Her mother had taught her and her four siblings at the kitchen table, using curricula from a Christian homeschooling service. A form that Serving His Children provided to volunteers contained a motto: "You don't have to be a licensed teacher to teach, or be in the medical field to put on Band Aids."

On a hot day this January, Twalali Kifabi's mother sat in a courtroom in Jinja, with a baby strapped to her back. Next to her was Twalali's grandmother Ziria Namutamba, who had taken him to Serving His Children and returned with his corpse. The other plaintiff against Bach, Annet Kakai, rested her head on the back of a wooden bench in front of her. She had travelled for hours on unpaved roads to get to this hearing, and her dress looked tight and uncomfortable.

Television crews from Ireland and the Netherlands had cameras trained on the women. There was also a correspondent from German public radio, along with two journalists from Australia and a podcaster from Florida. The hearing was perfunctory: the magistrate told attorneys from both sides that they had to attempt mediation before the court would intervene.

After it was over, Kakai sat beneath a tree in front of the courthouse, frustrated. "I'm looking for compensation—if I didn't want that, I would not have come and brought my case to court," she said. "As far as I can tell, Renée is not a doctor, and she gave my child the wrong medicine, and then the child became worse. If she was not a doctor, why did she put a health facility and bring our kids there?"

Namutamba said that even the chairman of her village thought that Bach was a doctor. "Then the child died, and I wasn't told what killed him," she said. She grew upset speaking about the consequences within her community. "The village scorns me for not taking care of the child right, and the mother of the child has questioned my judgment," she said, motioning toward her daughter. "Now I want Renée to face justice, so another mother doesn't end up in a situation where her child has died and she doesn't know why. Renée came to Uganda and presented herself as a medical person, and so she should compensate me."

Primah Kwagala, the attorney who founded the Women's Probono Initiative, explained that the lawsuit is based on charges of human-rights violations and of discrimination. "Treating Ugandan children without proper medical training and certification is a violation of their right to equality and freedom from discrimination on the ground of race and social status, contrary to Article 21 of the Constitution," she said. She suggested that S.H.C.'s staff did not believe poor people merited equal treatment: "Maybe you assume, because they've paid you nothing, they are entitled to nothing. We say that is discrimination."

When I asked Kwagala why she had selected these two families' cases for her lawsuit, she replied, "Because they had a bit of evidence. Everyone else is just saying, 'That happened to me,' but they don't have anything to show for it."

The evidence, though, is not clear-cut. According to the court filings on Twalali, the staff at S.H.C. made every effort to save him. I asked two independent doctors to review his medical records: a clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School with expertise in global health, and a Kenyan researcher who has studied malnutrition for more than a decade. Both noted that Twalali was extremely sick when he was admitted, on July 10, 2013. He had a fluid-filled abdomen and swollen lower limbs, typical of children with prolonged protein deprivation, and a cracked mouth indicating a severe vitamin deficiency. He had malaria, a respiratory infection, anemia, and dehydration from diarrhea.

COURTESY MARSHALL FOSTER

A stool sample, sent to a private hospital for analysis, indicated infectious gastroenteritis.

After Twalali was admitted, a night nurse examined him, and made a note to discuss antibiotic treatment with a doctor. The nurse inserted a plastic cannula into Twalali's vein to infuse antimalarial medication, and a nasogastric tube to supply nutrients and fluid. He was placed on oxygen, and his vital signs were monitored hourly. In the morning, he was examined by a doctor, who confirmed the nurse's decisions and countersigned the medication doses; in the six days Twalali stayed at S.H.C., that doctor visited him three times.

Following initial treatment, Twalali's malaria cleared, and he was less lethargic, happier. But his diarrhea got worse, and his temperature spiked. On July 15th, he started refusing food, and by the early hours of the next morning he was semi-comatose, struggling to breathe. On doctor's orders, nurses attempted to resuscitate him with intravenous fluids. He died at eleven o'clock.

After reviewing the records, the Harvard instructor told me, "My over-all conclusion is that there is no question this child was regularly attended and in general closely monitored." She added, however, that "the child likely needed higher-level and more frequent review by a physician or child-health expert, and there were a few deviations from standard management of malnutrition." Her greatest concern was that Twalali had received "far more I.V. fluid far quicker than is typical." The World Health Organization advises a conservative regime for malnourished children, out of fear that excessive fluid can lead to heart failure.

But, the Kenyan researcher noted, "this has generally been expert opinion with hardly any reliable research evidence." The W.H.O.'s restrictive approach has been a subject of debate for decades, with some recent studies showing that larger volumes of fluid produced better outcomes. So the doctor treating Twalali had a quandary: too little fluid and the boy could die of dehydration; too much and his system could be overwhelmed. The researcher said that it was a judgment call, difficult to evaluate without seeing the patient in the moment. "The discretion of the treating clinicians at the bedside is the single most important factor in matters of life and death," he told me.

Twalali's grandmother remembers seeing Bach personally treat the baby. But, when Twalali was admitted, Bach was on her way to the United States, and she remained there for the duration of his stay; her passport is exit-stamped July 10, 2013. Kwagala told me that this meant nothing to her: "You could have that stamp created on the street."

The case of Kakai's son Elijah is no more conclusive. The court filings contain no medical records for him, because according to S.H.C. he was never admitted. Kakai says in her affidavit that in July, 2018, Elijah received a diagnosis of tuberculosis at a hospital. An S.H.C. driver brought her and her son to a health center called Kigandalo, where S.H.C. was running a malnutrition program in partnership with the Ugandan government. But the nurses there wouldn't admit him, because they didn't have an isolated ward for T.B. patients. They did offer some fortified milk, which Kakai accepted, because her son was "small-bodied," and they gave her money for transportation home. Elijah got sicker, though, and the next day Kakai took him to a government hospital in her own district. He died there three days later. "I strongly believe," Kakai attests, that S.H.C.'s employees "did something to my child that led to his death." It is possible that Elijah received tainted milk at S.H.C., which killed him several days after he ingested it. But it is more likely that he died as a result of his tuberculosis and malnutrition.

Only one American medical practitioner provided an affidavit: Jacqueline Kramlich, a nurse who volunteered at S.H.C. in 2011. As the suit points out, S.H.C. was not licensed as a health facility during her time there; it did not issue official death certificates, just summaries of treatment and of the circumstances of death. Bach and her family maintain that these were bureaucratic oversights. Kramlich argues that the clinic's management showed a lack of supervision and professionalism. Bach "did not follow orders of any medical professional, but, rather, she gave orders to her nursing staff," she writes.

Kramlich arrived at Serving His Children a few months after finishing a B.A. in nursing. "I went in holding Renée in really high esteem, with the impression that she'd gotten in over her head, and there was no help to be found, *because it's Africa*—which is obviously not true," she told me. "What raised my flags is she didn't really seem to want my help once I was there. If I asked basic nursing questions—'Are there any contraindications for this medicine?'—she'd be, like, 'Don't worry.'"

Kramlich left S.H.C. after less than four months. In her resignation letter, she told the board, "Although Renee is very intelligent, quick to catch on, and unquestionably dedicated and motivated, the fact remains that she has no formal training in the medical practice with which she works every day." Kramlich added that it seemed "unreasonable, and even dangerous, that an untrained person like Renee should be in a supervisory position." Nonetheless, she wrote, she was grateful for the experience: "There were so many parts of Serving His Children that were such a blessing to be a part of."

Kramlich moved back to the United States in 2015. Her concerns might have been forgotten if not for a friend of hers: Kelsey Nielsen, an American social worker who was part of the same insular missionary world in Jinja. In 2018, Nielsen began an influential social-media campaign, called No White Saviors, that took aim at the failings of Western aid in Africa. Bach became her primary target. "Kelsey, she got it in her mind that it had not been dealt with," Kramlich told me. "She starts up this whole No White Saviors page, and she was going after Renée. I was, like, Oh, boy—buckle up. She's a very passionate person, even when she's completely stable."

"I feel like this is happening at the right time in my life," Kelsey Nielsen said at a café in Philadelphia, when she was in town visiting her mother, who lives in nearby Collegeville. If she were younger, the success of No White Saviors might have gone to her head, but Nielsen was about to turn thirty, and, after a decade of intermittent work in Uganda, she felt ready to lead a movement that was about issues, not egos. "People come up to us and treat us like we're celebrities," she said. "People online, too." In a year and a half, the campaign has attracted more than

three hundred thousand followers. "It's a lot of human beings. And it's fast."

Nielsen lives most of the year in Kampala, where she shares an office with Olivia Patience Alaso, a Ugandan social worker with whom she founded No White Saviors, and Wendy Namatovu, a more recent addition to the team. (They met when Namatovu, who worked at the coffee shop that Nielsen and Alaso frequented, recognized them from their Instagram account and introduced herself.) Their goal is to "decolonize development," by holding missionaries and humanitarians accountable for the assumption of white supremacy underlying their charity. In Uganda, No White Saviors hosts consciousness-raising workshops. On social media, it chides celebrities for enhancing their reputations by adopting African children, solicits funds for favored causes, and offers inspirational messages. (For Valentine's Day: "Roses are red, personal boundaries are healthy, 'justice' systems protect the white and the wealthy.") But the Bach story is what has propelled the group to prominence.

As the story broke in the international press, Alaso gave an impassioned interview to Al Jazeera. "People have taken Africa to be an experimental ground where you can come and do anything and walk away," she said. "If it was a black woman who went to the U.S. or any part of Europe and did this, they will be in jail right now—but, because of the white privilege, this woman is now free." No White Saviors was subsequently cited by NBC News, "Good Morning America," and ABC News. The BBC released a video introducing the "founders of the movement," showing Nielsen, a white woman with reddish hair in a blue Hawaiian shirt, bumping fists with Alaso, a thirty-two-year-old with short hair and an intense stare.

Nielsen first volunteered in Uganda in 2010, at an orphanage called Amani Baby Cottage—the place where Bach had worked two years earlier. Unlike Bach, Nielsen felt alienated by her fellow-missionaries in Jinja. "I had a bit of a different upbringing than a lot of the other white women that end up there," she said. "I grew up poor—single-parent household, abusive father."

For years, Nielsen blogged about the mental illness that she inherited from her father, and the ways in which he tore her down. "I did what all good daughters of abusive/absent Fathers do," she wrote in 2016. "I became a chameleon who could mold into whatever my audience wanted." When Nielsen was fourteen, her father died. "I went from being a straight-A student to then running away from home for a week at a time," she told me. "That was like the marker, if you look back, on my bipolar disorder manifesting."

Ultimately, Nielsen was able to get into Temple University, but needed five years to graduate, because she kept going back to Uganda to volunteer. In the college newspaper, Nielsen described her life in Jinja much as Bach had: "Making trips to the local hospital to pay for a 4-year-old with sickle cell to have a blood transfusion, making home visits to the village." She'd had malaria three times, but, she told another paper, "I just love loving the Ugandan people. I could get malaria a thousand times and still feel this is where I need to be."

Though Nielsen didn't overlap with Bach at Amani, she was well aware of her. To Nielsen, Bach and her friend Katie Davis "were, like, the cool girls of Jinja." Davis, another missionary, came to Uganda at eighteen, and within five years had become the legal guardian of thirteen Ugandan girls, whom she wrote about in her best-selling memoir "Kisses from Katie." Nielsen said, "Honestly, I remember wanting to be friends with Katie and Renée. They're the cool, young missionaries, starting their own N.G.O.s, adopting children." She recalled a New Year's Eve party at Bach's house in 2011: "All white people and their adopted black children."

Nielsen described her feelings toward Bach and Davis as simultaneously envious and disdainful. "I always thought that I was a little bit better than them, because I actually went to school for what I was doing," she said. Nielsen started her own N.G.O. in 2013, with a fellow-missionary she'd met at Amani. They called it Abide, and they sought to encourage impoverished families not to relinquish their children to orphanages, by giving parenting classes and helping them pay living expenses. (Nielsen thinks of herself now as a "white savior in recovery.")

Toward the end of 2013, a sick child named Sharifu stayed for several months in Abide's emergency housing. Nielsen posted pictures of him on Facebook, and Bach, noticing them, remembered that he had been treated at S.H.C. that spring. "We have a huge medical and history file on him," Bach wrote to Nielsen. "I can have someone get that to you." She added, with a frowny-face emoji, "It's super sad we live in the same town but never get to see each other." Nielsen sent a friendly reply: "We really need to fix the lack of hanging—coffee or breakfast?" She went on to say that Abide was also hosting Sharifu's grandmother, and training her in "parenting/attachment development." If that didn't work, they would have to consider having Sharifu adopted—his father, she said, posed a risk to his safety.

Nielsen told Bach that one of her social workers would follow up with Bach's employees, but no one did. Sharifu got sicker, and Nielsen and her colleagues took him to a hospital in Kampala, where he was given a diagnosis of heart problems. "They started raising money online, because they couldn't get him discharged without paying the bill," Bach recalled. She told Nielsen that S.H.C. would cover the shortfall. "I literally met her on the side of the road one day and handed over the money, and Kelsey was, like, 'Thanks, see ya,'" she said. "Then they made this social-media post that they had gone to see his cardiologist and that it was like this miracle: he's healed! And that night the kid just died. Then I started seeing her around town, and she would just look like she was going to kill me."

To this day, Nielsen blames Bach for Sharifu's death. When I asked her why, her response was convoluted. "He died of a heart attack because of the number . . . he was only like three and a half, four, and he had had too many . . . the stress on his internal organs . . . because severe malnutrition really puts a lot of stress on kids' organs," Nielsen said. "I remember sitting down and just telling Renée to her face, 'If you had followed up, you would've caught that the abuse and ne-

glect was there, and that he was getting sick again.'"

"We would have loved to follow up on our kids for years," Bach said. "But our focus was getting kids re-fed and back at home. It's sometimes an eight-hour drive to get to one of our clients—who all get at least one home visit from a nutritionist. Kelsey was, like, 'If he had never been at S.H.C., he'd still be alive.' I was, like, 'O.K., Kelsey, as a social worker, what would your advice be?' And she said, 'Hire more social workers; do longer follow-up care.' And literally the next month we hired another social worker, and we increased our aftercare from three to six months. I don't like her as a person, but she knows her trade. She went to school for social work—that must mean something."

Jacqueline Kramlich, who left Serving His Children shortly before Sharifu's death, told me that she had never understood why Nielsen blamed Bach: "You know, there's the Renée camp—'Renée's a saint, and she's never done a thing wrong in her life'—and then there's the Kelsey camp: 'Renée is completely evil, and she deserves to rot in prison.'" In the following year, the opposing factions in Jinja exchanged claims and counterclaims about Bach, and the line blurred between the verifiable and the outlandish.

Not everyone was worried about the same things. Kramlich told me, "What keys up the nonmedical public is, she was doing I.V.s. That's the least of my concerns. Renée was good at I.V.s! We used to say in nursing school, you can teach a monkey to put in an I.V. But she was prescribing medication. She started doing femoral taps and blood transfusions—I saw her do both of those things."

When I pressed Kramlich about witnessing Bach perform femoral taps, she conceded that it happened only once, and added, "In fairness, it was being taught to her at the time by an American M.D."

She had also seen only one blood transfusion: on a nine-month-old named Patricia, who came into S.H.C. with critically low hemoglobin. She needed an emergency transfusion, so Bach procured blood that matched Patricia's type from a hospital in Jinja. Kramlich says that she walked in on Bach performing the transfusion; Bach says that a nurse was with her, and a doctor supervised them by phone. The two women agree that Patricia had an allergic reaction to the transfusion, and that Bach rushed her to a hospital in Kampala. Five days later, when the girl needed more blood, Bach offered her own. ("I was praying that my blood would be to her as the blood of Christ is to me!" she wrote on her blog.) The transfusion worked, and Patricia survived.

Kramlich said she didn't realize that the situation at S.H.C. required intervention until after she quit. But, following her resignation, she heard many disturbing things "through the grapevine." The most alarming account, she said, came from S.H.C.'s head nurse, who told her that Bach had performed a thoracotomy on a child. This strains credulity: a thoracotomy is a major surgery that involves opening the chest cavity to gain access to the internal organs. The nurse, Constance Alonyo, filed an affidavit in Bach's defense. "They say I told Jackie that Renée has been doing wrong," she told me. "I went before the lawyer, I said, 'No, I did not say that!'"

In 2015, as Kramlich prepared to move back to the United States, she felt that it was her duty to do something about Bach. "I had a few friends—including Kelsey—and we grappled with: How do we handle this?" she said. In February, 2015, Kramlich met with the Jinja police and filed a report.

Kramlich now lives in Spokane, with her husband and four children they adopted in Uganda. She told me that the "cultlike" Christian milieu in Jinja was "drastically disillusioning" to her faith. "What you see over there is 'I never wanted to go to Africa, and then God told me I had to—it's *his* plan, not mine.' The problem is, if you can't make the choice to do it, then you can't make the choice to stop doing it." Kramlich is a patient-care manager at Assured Home Health, a facility for the elderly. She is also a co-creator of the Instagram account Barbie Savior, which follows the adventures of a Barbie doll engaged in "voluntourism": taking a selfie next to a black baby on a hospital cot, squatting over a pit latrine. The bio reads, "Jesus. Adventure. Africa. Two worlds. One love. Babies. Beauty. Not qualified. Called. 20 years young. It's not about me . . . but it kind of is."

On March 12, 2015, soon after Kramlich spoke with the police, Jinja's district health officer arrived unannounced at S.H.C. and ordered Bach to shut down immediately, because her operating license was no longer valid. (This

"Dinner's ready, if you want to take a break from your personal space."

"Things are going great with Prince Charming. The problem is his parents, King Cruel and Queen Haughty."

• •

was not technically the case; it had expired ten weeks before, but there was a three-month grace period for renewal.) "He told us, 'Get all these kids out of here by five,'" Bach recalled. "It was one o'clock, and we had eighteen kids, and most of them were new admissions! We were, like, 'What? Where are we supposed to send them?' He was, like, 'I don't care.'"

Constance Alonyo described a chaotic scene: "Everybody was crying. The moms were crying; the workers were crying. I said, 'What is *happening*?'" The staff scrambled to find placements for the children. Bach said, "A couple of them could be discharged, and a lot of them we drove to this hospital that had a nutrition program, about three hours east of us. But it was a disaster. I mean, the D.H.O. looked me in the face and said, 'Yes, some of these patients will die, but it's not your responsibility.' We had this one infant who was like eight hundred grams, super tiny. We had kids on oxygen who had to be transported on oxygen. And then, of course, within the next three days eight of those kids did die. But he's our authority—we couldn't say no." (The officer did not respond to requests for comment.)

Though Bach denies any wrongdoing, she followed the advice of her "church elders"—several male missionaries in their late twenties who saw themselves as leaders of the Jinja Christian community—and wrote an open letter acknowledging the accusations. "Over the years I have unfortunately been put in situations where I felt it necessary to act outside my qualifications," she wrote. "I can see and do not deny my past mistakes as a leader." S.H.C. remained closed for two years. "The organization as a whole was, like, 'Maybe this is as good a time as any to take a pause,'" Bach said.

Eventually, S.H.C. reopened in partnership with the government, at Kigandalo Health Center IV, with Bach serving in an administrative post. But, in the meantime, mothers kept coming to the house in Masese, so they were shuttled to Nalufenya children's hospital, where Bach had arranged to provide food and to sponsor medication. "I would wake up so many mornings and a mom who we'd sent to the hospital two days ago would be sitting on my front step, with her baby's dead body, because she didn't have any way to get home," Bach said. "I wanted to put every one of those moms in my car and drive them over to Kelsey's house and be, like, 'This is on you.'"

Nielsen was having her own problems. In 2014, she says, she was sexually assaulted. "My drinking got way worse. My mental health was not O.K.," she told me in Philadelphia. Nielsen parted ways with Abide, the organization she'd started. "Uganda was my identity. Abide was my identity," she said. "I needed to come home and experience just a really sad, heartbreaking separation." Back in the U.S., she spent a week in a mental hospital. "I did it three times before I found the medication that worked," she added. During one manic episode, Nielsen went online and started posting about Bach. "If you had a textbook of what mania looks like, that's what it was," Nielsen said. "Some of—a lot of—it was true, but it was not dealt with properly."

Since then, Nielsen has continued posting on Facebook about S.H.C. "You should *pray* about renaming your organization KILLING HIS CHILDREN," she wrote on the organization's page in 2016. "Must be nice to experiment on children medically with the help of YouTube videos and unending praise from your literal unintelligent and ignorant donor base. Please get out of Uganda willingly before I continue pursuing legal means to have your founder and your board thrown in AMERICAN prison."

Though Nielsen and No White Saviors have raised money for Primah Kwagala's case against Bach, Nielsen feels that it is not enough. "Primah's given us some tricky advice—like not going to the police with this," she said. (Kwagala denies saying this.) "But we met with the Central Police in Kampala, the homicide unit, and actually they've now started investigating. There are multiple families that Renée doesn't even know we've been in touch with, that have been interviewed by the police." Nielsen added that her group gave the police two thousand dollars. "The way that money works is, they never would've been able to go

forward without it," she told me, explaining that the police had already budgeted their resources for other cases. A spokesman for the Kampala police denied the existence of any investigation into Bach or Serving His Children.

Nielsen told me that she had never witnessed Bach engaging in inappropriate medical care: "I would hear her talk about it, read the blog posts, all of that, but, no, I wasn't the one seeing her do it." She has no doubt, though, that what she has heard is true. She believes that Bach's supporters will stop at nothing to protect her, but vowed that she would not be dissuaded from her mission. "If my dad can yell, 'You're not shit,' and I can watch him pin my mom up against the wall and live in fear for fourteen years of my life," Nielsen told me, "I can come up against Renée Bach."

At Nalufenya, five cots were jammed into a small emergency room, with three infants perched on each one; in the hallway, some thirty people waited on benches to have their children examined. "And this is the morning!" Abner Tagoola, the head of the hospital, said. "In the evening, you will wonder if it's a hospital or a marketplace." Tagoola estimated that, on average, two hundred people a day come to the hospital, and ten per cent are admitted. I asked what happened to the other ninety per cent. "Exactly," Tagoola, a tall, commanding man wearing a purple dress shirt under a white coat, said. "In America, there's health insurance—there's everything. Here, we are overwhelmingly congested." Even malnourished children who are admitted to Nalufenya are rarely able to stay as long as they should, he said: "We stabilize them, but they are still malnourished, and then we take them back home. The structure by government to help those who are still malnourished does not exist. That was the gap Renée was trying to fill."

Bach's critics accuse her of luring mothers from Nalufenya to her own facility. Tagoola, who has been a pediatrician for twenty years, said that the idea was ludicrous. "If a mother knows that she is likely to get free food and she's going to get free medicine—what would *you* do?" He shook his head. "Some of these things are contextual. In America, they can't believe a baby can just die. Here, they can die." He clapped his hands hard and fast. Every time a child died, it made other parents warier of the hospital. Pointing at three babies on a cot, he said, "If one dies, a mother—a real mother—why would she stay? She says, 'I have to go look for where there is support.'"

According to a study published in 2017 in *The American Journal for Clinical Nutrition*, fourteen per cent of children treated for severe acute malnutrition at Mulago Hospital—Uganda's best facility—died. The study notes that the over-all mortality rate in Africa for children with S.A.M. is between twenty and twenty-five per cent. During the years when Serving His Children functioned as an in-patient facility, its rate was eleven per cent.

"To be sincere, if you asked me to work with Renée again, I would work with her," Tagoola said. "We still are underfunded, so her role would be very relevant." Nalufenya receives support from UNICEF, but, Tagoola said, "if we had double, it would not be enough." He sighed. "It was out of desperation—from my position, 'desperation' is the key word—to help these babies that she did these things. It's not that she was overenthusiastic to do miracles."

After the suit was filed, the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council conducted an independent investigation, based on interviews with hospital administrators, leaders in the districts where the organization operated, and

S.H.C. staff. "The team is unable to support allegations that children died in large numbers due to the services of S.H.C.," the report states. "The team did not find evidence that Ms. Renée Bach, Director of S.H.C., was treating children. The community and the health workers at Kigandalo HC IV were appreciative of her work."

Gideon Wamasebu, the district health officer of Manafwa, worked with Bach in 2012 to establish a feeding program at a government health center called Bugobero. "The thing that is wrong is to say that Renée was seeing patients," he told me. "It is me—a doctor—who was in charge. But she had the money. She said, 'Doctor, give me the right people to work with,' and all I gave her were qualified doctors working at government facilities." He was particularly struck, he said, by a claim in the court case: Charles Olweny, a driver for S.H.C., said that he had ferried the bodies of between seven and ten dead children home every week. "There are not enough children in the district for that many killings," Wamasebu said. "And, if you are in a community which has some leadership, would they just be looking away? It is insulting!"

Bach's accusers say that the Ugandans who defend S.H.C. are covering up their own culpability. "If Renée goes down, you all go down," one of them told me. Wamasebu pointed out that, when he was working with Bach and sending children to her program, Bugobero was the top-rated health center of its kind in Uganda. "So the facility that is No. 1 is sending patients to be killed at that rate? It doesn't make sense."

One morning, I went to the Jinja police station to look at the initial report that Jacqueline Kramlich had filed against S.H.C., and to ask if the guardians of any children had filed reports of their own. I was told to wait on a wooden bench for an officer named Hudson. In a central courtyard, a ritual called the "parade of suspects" was taking place: a dozen young men were pulled out of a cell and asked to stand in front of their accusers, while Hudson, a bald man in casual clothes, made marks on a clipboard. After a while, he summoned me into his office, where a poster on the wall read "Gossip ends at a wise man's ears."

When I brought up Renée Bach, he asked me several times to repeat the name and seemed to have no idea whom I was referring to. If I wanted to see a copy of the report, he said, I had to pay a fee at the local bank and bring back a receipt.

I didn't have time to go to the bank; I had another meeting planned, with a man named Semei Jolley Kyebakola—a former gardener for S.H.C., who filed an affidavit against the group and served as the translator when the dead children's

guardians filed their court documents. He'd also built a sideline taking journalists to the villages outside Jinja to meet these women, along with several others who stepped forward after they heard about the case.

I waited for Kyebakola at a crowded restaurant on the edge of town, known for its goat stew. I texted him that it would be easy to find me because I was the only *mzungu*—white person—in the place. The first thing he said when he walked in was "You are the one who has been to the police station?" Hudson had called to let him know.

Kyebakola told me that he had seen Bach practice medicine, and that the court case proved it. When I asked what Ugandan doctors and nurses had done wrong in treating Twalali Kifabi, he changed tack, complaining that he and Charles Olweny were fired without cause. "We just ask for a salary increment, but instead you terminate us without a reason!" he said. "If you are a Christian, how can you do that?" He then told me that Bach had tried to hire them back after a time. "She begged us. I say to Renée, 'What you are doing is like a man using a condom: after throwing it away, again you go back and put on the condom and use it.'"

I felt uncomfortable getting in a car with Kyebakola, knowing that the police had reported to him on my activities. When I told him that I would not go with him to the villages, he said angrily that I had come only to protect my fellow-*mzungu*. "And you call yourself a Christian!" he yelled. (I told him several times: I call myself a Jew.) "The problem is, whites, you claim you are Christian, but you are not. How do you expect me to live? You are telling me to go steal! As a Christian, you should pay. There is no money which is enough—but try! If you see Renée, tell her: it is better to settle out of court." A few minutes after I parted ways with Kyebakola, Hudson sent a message letting me know that he would not be supplying a copy of the police report.

From time to time after that, Kyebakola sent me conspiracy-theory articles and strange video clips via WhatsApp. One claimed that the scientist Robert Gallo had admitted, "We were forced to create the HIV virus as a secret weapon to wipe out the African race." Another, about a man who implanted his "infected blood" in Cadbury products, was accompanied by obviously doctored photographs of people whose lips had supposedly grown to enormous size after they ingested the candy. Then, in February, I opened a video from Kyebakola and realized after a few seconds that it was grainy, violent child pornography: a white man hurting a sobbing white five- or six-year-old, as she screamed for mercy.

After I contacted the police and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, I let Kelsey Nielsen know that Kyebakola—whose number she'd given me—had sent me child pornography. "Olivia and Wendy both said that it is common when there is a concerning/disturbing video, people here will share it more as a concern over what is happening," Nielsen replied. "It might have been good to ask him for context and to know why he's sending it." After a bit of back-and-forth, Nielsen agreed that there was no condonable explanation. "I apologize for any of my initial confusion," she said. "I sometimes let Olivia and Wendy override my own reaction when it's 'culture.'"

Life has made Constance Alonyo resilient. She raised fifteen children: three of her own, and twelve from her brothers, who died in the insurgency that racked northern Uganda after 1986. "It is a lot of children," she said, laughing. "I am carrying the Cross!" But life was difficult even before she became a mother. When Alonyo was a teen-ager, she was abducted from her school with twenty-six of her classmates by Lord's Resistance Army soldiers, who beat the girls and dragged them into the forest. "They walk us two miles, lock us in a house, light it on fire. I said, 'Why must we die today?'" Alonyo persuaded her classmates to form a human battering ram, hurling themselves against a wall until it collapsed and they were able to escape. Her father's house was also burned, and his cows were taken. "After my father lost all his riches, he took Jesus as his Lord and Saviour," Alonyo said, and she followed suit. "Me, I love Jesus Christ!" she told me, smiling jubilantly. "Even as I am treating the children, I am singing to the Lord. I do not want to be the Devil's toolbox."

All of Alonyo's colleagues at the Kigandalo Health Center's malnutrition ward—a squat, three-room building with giraffes and monkeys painted on its walls—are born-again Christians, as Serving His Children requires. But some of their patients are Muslim; a woman in a black abaya sat with an emaciated baby on her lap, watching as Alonyo tried to engage another infant with a

toy monkey. "*Toko toko toko!*" Alonyo chanted, bouncing the monkey on the edge of a cot where a dazed baby named Trevor sat under mosquito netting. Trevor, who had a fluff of reddish hair, a sign of edematous malnutrition, remained impassive.

"He had severe, severe malaria," Alonyo said. All five of the babies parked on cots in that room had some kind of complication: malnutrition devastates the immune system, and makes children more vulnerable to diarrhea, pneumonia, and malaria. According to UNICEF, four out of ten children under the age of five die of malnutrition in Uganda, and one out of three children that age is stunted. "There are many factors," Alonyo said. "It can be the death of the mother, or the death of the father, who is the breadwinner. And then it can also be polygamy—very many wives, very many children, no taking of responsibility. It's also lack of land: most of it has been occupied by sugarcane, so they have very little land for farming, and the food that they get they put into selling it off, as they need to get also some other commodities. And then there is ignorance." Some people simply have never heard of malnutrition: their children get sick, and they have no idea why.

In the next room, a baby named Hope sobbed inconsolably as a young nurse tried to find a vein for an I.V. "Sorry, baby!" the nurse said, as she pierced the infant's skinny arm. Alonyo frowned: infants are notoriously difficult to catheterize. "It is even harder now, because we don't have the small cannulas we need," she said, shaking her head at the size of the port that the nurse was trying to insert. Since the story of the lawsuit broke, S.H.C.'s funding has dwindled, and the clinic has been running out of supplies, including food for the mothers of malnourished children. "Now we can only give them beans and *posho*"—a porridge made from maize meal—"which affects the quality of the breast milk," Alonyo said. An expat in the area had promised to graze his goats on the facility's land so the staff could collect milk for the children, but he rescinded the offer. "Maybe he saw some information," Alonyo said, "and then he got worried."

Alonyo, who was wearing a blue Serving His Children apron over her nursing clothes, has tried to impress upon her boss the virtue of steadfastness. "I told her, 'Renée, look here: what you are carrying is the Cross,'" Alonyo said. "Jesus carried the Cross and fell down—the Cross is heavy!" She shook her head. "They are talking that Renée killed. How did we kill? Did we strangle? Did we cut? Did we slaughter? You mean to say up till now, outside here, people are not dying when they are sick?" She motioned toward baby Hope. "If that child collapsed, are you going to say that Constance killed that child? I am trying to help with medicine, but it is not always possible, because I'm not God. That child died because the child is too sick!"

Since July, Renée Bach has been staying in a one-room house, a few minutes' drive from her parents' home along a road that bisects fields of brown cows. One afternoon, she was sitting on the floor, next to a little white tepee full of toys and children's books. On the wall, she'd tacked up a Theodore Roosevelt quote: "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood."

Bach told me, "I am not sitting here claiming I never did anything wrong." She said that she obsesses over potential failings, "recounting every interaction you've ever had with another human and wondering, Was I hurting or was I helping that person?" On reflection, some of Nielsen's arguments had moved her. "I believe in what No White Saviors stands for," Bach said. "There are a lot of people who go to developing environments and they exploit people. That should be a global conversation: are we presenting ourselves and the work that we're doing in a way that's honoring the people we are ministering to, and caring for, or sponsoring, or whatever?"

But it is funding, as much as philosophy, that dictates the relationship between aid workers and the recipients of their services. As one doctor from Mayuge who has worked with S.H.C. put it, "Let me be honest—most Ugandans, they see *mzungus* and they see money." This is not because they are corrupt; it's because they're trying to survive.

Kramlich said, "It's a complicated feeling to know that the funding dried up. I think they were doing a lot of things well. There was good food there. It was a clean center. They had money! I just don't know why Renée couldn't get out of her own fucking way." Another former S.H.C. volunteer, a social worker named Bliss Gustafson, who now works for the New York City school system, told me, "In my heart of hearts, do I believe that Renée was probably a better nurse than Jackie in that setting? One hundred per cent. Doesn't mean it's O.K. The only reason she's getting away with it is that it's black and brown babies in Uganda. White people who go to Africa, we all make these sort of 'I can do this better' mistakes. We all have that mentality to some degree—that's why we go over there."

I asked Bach if she felt that she was being tested, as Alonyo had suggested, and she shook her head. "To be honest, this whole situation has shaken my faith in a serious way. When someone says, 'This is what God wants me to do,' I'm, like, 'Yeah, *sure*.'" She missed the sense of devotion that she once had. "Every day, I knew that I was supposed to be there, and that's a really powerful feeling," she said. "And then shit hits the fan. I'm, like, Wait, what? Was I not supposed to do those things? Did I misinterpret what my purpose in life was? Even now, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. Aside from being a mom, I have no idea." Bedford was not a long-term option. "Selah is the only black kid in her entire school, and that's not what I want for her," Bach said. "It's actually still pretty racist around here." She recalled an incident at a fair, when she heard one girl say to another, not quite out of Selah's earshot, "That girl is so black I wonder if her parents left her in a fire."

Bach's two sisters live in California—one is a nanny, the other a doctor—and she was considering moving there. "I want to be in a place where I could live a life of service again," she said. "I genuinely enjoy helping people. And I feel like an idiot saying that, because everyone is, like, 'You just killed a bunch of people.' I would love to live in a really low-income, diverse community—like immersion. Just to move into a Section 8 housing community, and not be completely ostracized, is an art." ♦

The Other One

Tessa Hadley

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEA DE GIACOMO

When Heloise was twelve, in 1986, her father was killed in a car crash. But it was a bit more complicated than that. He was supposed to be away in Germany at a sociology conference, only the accident happened in France, and there were two young women in the car with him. One of them was his lover, it turned out in the days and weeks after the crash, and the other one was his lover's friend. He'd never even registered at the conference. Didn't it seem strange, Heloise's mother asked long afterward, in her creaky, surprised, lightly ironic voice, as if it only touched her curiosity, that the two lovebirds had taken a friend along with them for their tryst in Paris? The lover was also killed; her friend was seriously injured. Heloise's mother, Angie, had found out some of these things when she rushed to be at her husband's bedside in a hospital in France: he lived on for a few days after the accident, though he never recovered consciousness.

That time was blurred in Heloise's memory now, more than thirty years later. She'd been convinced for a while that she'd accompanied her mother to France; vividly she could picture her father, motionless in his hospital bed, his skin yellow-brown against the pillow, his closed eyelids bulging and naked without their rimless round glasses, his glossy black beard spread out over the white sheet. But Angie assured her that she was never there. Anyway, Clifford had shaved off his beard by then. "I should have known he was shaving it off for someone," Angie said. "And why would I have taken you with me, darling? You were a little girl, and I didn't know what I was going to find when I got there. I've mostly blocked out my memory of that journey—it was the worst day of my life. I've no idea how I got across London or onto the ferry, though, strangely, I remember seeing the gray water in the dock, choppy and frightening. I was frightened. I felt surrounded by monstrosities—I suppose I was worried that his injuries might be monstrous. Once I was actually there and I saw him, I was able to grasp everything. I had time to think. It's a bizarre thing to say, but that hospital was a very peaceful place. It was connected to some kind of religious order—there were cold stone floors and a high vaulted ceiling, nuns. Or at least that's how I remember it. I've forgotten the name of the hospital, so I can't Google it to check. Probably it doesn't exist now."

"Did you see her?"

"Who?"

"Delia, the lover."

"Delia wasn't the lover. She was the other one. The lover was killed instantly, in the accident, when they hit the tree. They took her body away."

Heloise and Angie were sitting drinking wine at Angie's kitchen table, in the same skinny four-story Georgian house in Bristol where they'd all lived long ago with Clifford, in the time before the accident: Heloise and her older brother, Toby, and their younger sister, Mair. Angie hadn't even changed the big pine kitchen table since then, although she'd done things to the rest of the kitchen—it was smarter and sleeker now than it used to be, when the fashion was for everything to look homemade and authentic. She and Clifford had bought the table from a dealer in the early days of their marriage; she had stripped off its thick pink paint with Nitromors. And then she'd worked with that dealer for a while, going through country houses with him and keeping his best pieces in her home to show to customers. She couldn't part with the old table, she said; so many friends and family had sat around it over the years. And now she was seventy-two.

Heloise didn't have her mother's gift of lightness. Angie was tall and thin, stooped, with flossy gray silk mingling in her messy, faded hair. Vague and charming, she had escaped from a posh county family whose only passionate feelings, she said, were for dogs and property. Heloise was stocky, top-heavy with bosom, and serious, with thick, kinked tobacco-brown hair and concentrating eyes; she looked more like her father, whose Jewish family had come to the East End of London from Lithuania in the early twentieth century. She didn't think her personality was much like his, though; she wasn't audacious. She had kept the obituary that appeared in an academic journal—Angie said she didn't want it—which expressed shock and sadness at the loss of "an audacious original thinker," whose book, "Rites of Passage in Contemporary Capitalist Societies," was required reading for radicals. The obituary didn't mention the problem of the lover. And there were no obituaries in any of the big newspapers; Clifford would have felt slighted by that, if he'd been able to know it—he'd have believed that it was part of the conspiracy against him. Probably no one read his book these days.

Sometimes, when Heloise spoke to her therapist, she imagined her father's death slicing through her life like a sword, changing her completely with one blow; at other times, she thought that, in truth, she'd always been like this, reserved and sulky, wary. She knew other children of those brilliant, risky marriages of the nineteen-seventies who were taciturn and full of doubt like her. Her parents had been such an attractive, dynamic couple, so outward-turning; the crowd of friends dropping in to talk and eat and drink and smoke pot was always on the brink of becoming a party. From the landing on the top floor, where their bedrooms were, or venturing farther down the deep stairwell, Toby and Heloise and Mair, along with strangers' children put to sleep on the spare mattresses, had spied over the bannisters on the adults, who were careless of what the children witnessed: shouted political arguments; weeping; snogging; someone flushing her husband's pills down the lavatory; the husband swinging his fist at her jaw; Angie dancing to Joni Mitchell with her eyes closed, T-shirt off, her pink nipples bare and arms reaching up over her head, long hands washing over each other; Clifford trying to burn five-pound notes in the gas fire and yelling to tell everyone that Angie was frigid, that Englishwomen of her class were born with an icebox between their legs. Angie called him "a dirty little Jew," and then lay back on her beanbag chair, laughing at how absurd they both were.

But that was all ancient history, and now Heloise was in her mid-forties, divorced, with two young children, running her own small business from home—finding and styling locations for photo shoots—and making just about enough money to live on and pay her half of the mortgage. When she met a woman called Delia at a dinner party, the name didn't strike her at first; it was just a name. It was a late summer's evening, and dinner began with white wine outdoors in a small, brick-walled garden, its smallness disproportionate to the dauntingly tall

back of the terraced house, built on a steep hill in Totterdown; there were espaliered apple trees trained around the garden walls. The guests' intimacy thickened as the light faded; birds bustled in the dusk amongst the leaves, and a robin spilled over with his song. Venus pierced the clear evening sky. They all said that they wouldn't talk politics but did anyway, as if their opinions had been dragged out of them, their outrage too stale to be enjoyable. Was it right or wrong to use the word "fascism" to describe what was happening in the world? Was the future of socialism in localism? Their host, Antony, put out cushions on the stone seats and on the grass, because of the cold coming up from the earth; he poured more wine. Heloise had her hair pinned up; she was wearing her vintage navy crêpe dress.

She liked Delia right away.

Delia was older than the rest of them, with a lined, tanned, big-boned face and an alert, frank, open gaze; her dark hair was streaked with gray and cut in a gamine style, fringe falling into her eyes, which made her look Italian, Heloise thought, like an Italian intellectual. Around her neck on a cord hung a striking, heavy piece of twisted silver, and as the air grew cooler she wrapped herself in an orange stole, loose-woven in thick wool, throwing one end over her shoulder. Everything Delia did seemed graceful and natural. Heloise was full of admiration, at this point in her own life, for older women who managed to live alone and possess themselves with aplomb; she was learning how to be single again, and she didn't want to end up like her mother, volatile and carelessly greedy. Delia was a violinist, it turned out, and taught violin to children, Suzuki-style; this was how she'd got to know Antony, because his younger son came to her classes. She hadn't been to his home before, and said that she liked the neat creative order in his garden; it made her think of a medieval garden in a story. And she was right, Heloise thought. There was something Chaucerian about Antony, in a good way, with his pink cheeks and plump hands, soft, shapeless waist, baggy corduroy trousers, tortoiseshell-framed glasses, tousled caramel-colored hair.

"Delia's like the Pied Piper!" he enthused. "At the end of the morning, she leads the kids around the community center in a sort of conga line, playing away on these violins as tiny as toys, past the Keep Fit and French Conversation and the Alzheimer's Coffee Morning, all of them bowing away like crazy at Schumann and Haydn. Some of these kids have never heard classical music in their lives before. And yet it all sounds great: it's in tune! Or almost in tune, almost!"

Antony and Heloise had been close friends since university. He worked for the city planning department, which was innovative and chronically short-staffed and underfunded. Like her, he was bringing up his children as a single parent; his wife had left him and gone back to Brazil. Heloise had secret hopes of Antony. He wasn't the kind of man she'd ever have chosen when they were young together—too kind, not dangerous enough—but recently she'd come to see him differently. It was as if she'd turned a key in the door of her perception, opening it onto a place that had existed all along. How whole Antony was! How nourishing his company, how sound his judgments! She kept her hopes mostly hidden, though, even from herself. She was afraid of spoiling their friendship through a misunderstanding, or a move made too soon.

Delia said that intonation always came first, in the Suzuki method. No matter how simple a piece you're playing, it should sound right from the very beginning. The conversation became animated, because the other guests were parents of young children, too, and intensely concerned about the creativity of their offspring. Heloise thought that Delia looked amused, as if she was used to parents thinking their children were prodigies, because they liked banging away on a piano. Antony wished that his older boy would take lessons, but he had been diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, and wasn't good at following directions; Heloise thought that this boy was sometimes just plain naughty, though she didn't say so to Antony. When she suggested that she'd like to bring her own five-year-old daughter, Jemima, to the class, Delia told her the time and the venue. There were still a couple of places free. Teaching was a great pleasure, she added. She liked the company of children, and had never had any of her own. Heloise marvelled at how calmly Delia talked about herself, not trailing ragged ends of need or display.

"And what about your own playing?" somebody asked her. "Do you still play?"

She belonged to a quartet that met twice a week, she said, and played sometimes with another friend, who was a pianist; they put on concerts from time to time. "I had hopes of playing as a professional when I was young," she added. "I won some competitions and dreamed of being a soloist—it was probably only a dream. But then I was involved in a car accident in France—I damaged my neck and my hands—I was ill for a long time. And that was the end of that."

The light was almost gone from the garden. Antony had slipped inside to serve up the food. He was a good cook; appetizing smells were coming from the kitchen. Through the open glass doors, Heloise could see yellow lamplight spilling over his books piled up on the coffee table, a folded plaid blanket on a sofa, the children's toys put away in a toybox; beyond that, a table set with glasses and colored napkins, a jug filled with fresh flowers and greenery.

"It was such a long time ago," Delia said, laughing to console the others when they exclaimed over her awful loss. "Like I said, I was very young. It was really all very tragic, but don't worry. It happened to me in another life."

It was possible that Delia's accident had nothing to do with Heloise's father. There might have been two accidents in France, two Delias. If it was the same accident, then why hadn't she identified Heloise when they met or guessed whose daughter she was? Heloise was a pretty unusual name. But then, why would Clifford have mentioned his children's names to a girl who was only his lover's friend? Perhaps he had met Delia for the first time on that fateful day: it was likely that she'd come along only for the drive, a lift to Paris. Anyway, he wouldn't have been talking about his children to either of those young women. He'd have been pretending, at least to himself, that he wasn't really the father of a family, that he could do anything he dared to do, that he was as young and

free as the girls were, his life his own to dispose of. And, after the accident, when Delia had endured months and perhaps years of suffering and rehabilitation, and lost her hope of a career as a performer, why would she have wanted to find out anything about the family whose happiness had been ruined along with hers? She'd have wanted everything connected with Clifford to fall behind her into oblivion. Into the lead-gray sea.

Heloise talked all these possibilities through with her therapist; she didn't want to talk to anyone else, not yet. The therapist was wary of her excitement. She asked why it was important for Heloise right now to find a new connection with her father, and suggested a link between the breakdown of her marriage and her feelings of abandonment at the time of her father's death. "What did you do, when this woman told the story of her accident? How did you react?"

"Somehow I was all right. I'd drunk a couple of glasses of wine, I was feeling surprisingly mellow—for me, anyway. And then, when I suddenly understood who she was—or might be—I felt as if something clicked into place, and I belonged to her. Or she belonged to me. Everything belonged together. It was probably the wine."

Antony had called them in to eat, just as Delia was finishing her story, and Heloise had stood up from her cushion on the stone bench, elated. She'd almost spoken out then and there—but she'd had more sense, knew that this wasn't the right time to open up anything so momentous, not in company. However well balanced Delia appeared, it would be painful to have her buried history brought back to life. So Heloise had gone inside instead, ahead of the others, and put her arms around Antony, who was standing at the sink lifting a tray of vegetables from the bamboo steamer. Because of the kind of man he was, he wasn't annoyed at her getting in between him and the tricky moment of his serving up the food, but put down the vegetables and hugged her back, enthusiastically. "Hey, what's this in honor of?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just. Such a nice dinner party."

He said that she looked lovely in her vintage dress with the Art Deco brooch, like a learned Jewess from Minsk or Vilnius in the old days, and Heloise realized that this was exactly the look she'd been trying for. She put her outfits together, always, with the same effort she might use in dressing a room for a shoot, working toward some idea at the back of her mind, like an old photograph or a painting.

For the rest of the evening, she'd been more lively and talkative than usual, conscious of the extraordinary story of the accident that she was hoarding inside her, charged with emotion and as dramatic as an opera. Watching Delia, she'd enjoyed the way she held her fork, the poised, elegant angle of her wrist and her rather big brown hand; how she sat up very straight and listened to the others with intelligent interest, reserving her own judgment. She did have Mediterranean heritage, as Heloise had guessed, though it was not Italian but Spanish. Her politics were quite far left but not doctrinaire; she was well informed and thoughtful. As she grew older, Heloise decided, she'd like to wear clothes in Delia's easy style, made of homespun wool or linen, dyed in natural colors.

Jemima wasn't a musical prodigy, it turned out. But she enjoyed the Suzuki classes and for a while, in the first flush of enthusiasm, even carried her tiny violin around with her at home, tucked under her chin, and bowed out her answers to Heloise's questions in snatches of "Twinkle, Twinkle" or "The Happy Farmer" instead of words. And Delia in the different context of the classes was a revelation: not kindly and encouraging, as Heloise had imagined her, but crisp and unsmiling, even stern. Making music was not a game, she conveyed, but an initiation into a realm of great significance. The children responded well to this, as if it was a relief that something for once wasn't all about them. Unconsciously, they imitated Delia's straight back, the flourish of her bowing, the dip of her head on the first beat of the bar; they were carried outside themselves in the music's flow. Their parents, too, were intimidated and gratified by Delia's severity. She liked them to stay to watch the class, so that they could encourage good practice at home during the week, and mostly they obediently did stay.

Usually, Heloise sat through these sessions with Antony, and toward the end of the class one or the other of them would go off to pick up the two older boys—Heloise's Solly and Antony's Max—from their football club. Through the crowded busyness of the rest of her week, Heloise anticipated with pleasure

"For future reference, when God starts talking about how messed up the world is, he's really just fishing for compliments."

this hour of enforced mute stillness, squeezed up against Antony on the community-center benches, in the big, characterless white room, with its missing ceiling tiles and broken Venetian blinds, feeling his companionable warmth along her flank, buoyed up by the children's music. The room smelled of hot plastic from the lights, and of sweat from the Zumba class that came before Suzuki. Sometimes, she and Antony bought lunch together afterward at the café in the center, depending on how wound up Max was from football. None of this would have been so straightforward if Antony's ex-wife, Carlota, the boys' mother, hadn't gone back to Brazil. Heloise couldn't help feeling a surge of selfish relief when she thought of it; she'd found Carlota abrasive and difficult. When she'd told Antony once that her ex-husband, Richard, had complained that she wasn't spontaneous, Antony confessed in exchange that Carlota had called him an old woman. "Which was kind of surprising, coming from her," he added, with the modest amount of owlish irony he permitted himself, "as she was supposed to be such a feminist."

Heloise had told Antony years ago, when they first knew each other, about her father's accident, although not about the lover, because that had still felt shaming then, private. Angie had always wanted to tell everyone everything, as a twisted, crazy joke: wasn't life just bound to turn out like that! Now Heloise came close, on several occasions, to explaining to Antony her occult connection, through the accident, with Delia: a connection that might or might not exist. Each time, however, the moment passed; Max threw one of his tantrums, or Jemima spilled her water. And she hadn't said anything, yet, to Delia herself—with every week that she delayed, it grew more difficult to imagine bringing up the subject. The whole story seemed so improbably far-fetched, and, even if it had really ever happened, it was a million years ago, in another age. At the Suzuki classes, anyway, Delia was too remote, impersonal: she belonged to everyone; it would have been inappropriate to take her aside and make that special claim on her.

Apparently, Antony was having viola lessons with her, one evening a week. Heloise hadn't known that he used to play when he was younger. She wished she had some such privileged way into intimacy with Delia; she was shy in the face of the older woman's authority, her self-sufficiency. Delia was always perfectly friendly, but she would never join them for lunch; she rehearsed with her string quartet, she said, on Saturday afternoons. Heloise suspected that she took in, too, with some distaste, the mess at their shared table in the café: the chips afloat in spilled water, the older boys high with adrenaline from their game, obnoxiously shouty, eyes glittering and faces hot, hair pasted down with sweat.

Heloise's brother, Toby, was over from L.A., where he worked in the music business; he came to spend a few days in Bristol with their mother. Richard had the children on Saturday night, so Heloise went to have supper with Toby and Angie at the old kitchen table. Toby was like their mother, rangy and tall and thin, with silky graying reddish curls; he had the same rawboned sex appeal that Angie used to have—indolent, indifferent to what anyone thought about him, scratching carelessly at the hollow white belly exposed under his too-short T-shirt, leaning back in his chair and stretching his long legs under the table, so that his big feet in scruffy Converse trainers intruded into Heloise's space. He and Angie were mesmerizing when they exerted their allure, auburn like angels; and then sometimes they were unabashedly ugly, ill-tempered,

with their pale-lard coloring, blue eyes small with exhaustion, the sex-light withdrawn like a favor they were bored with proffering.

Angie was happy because Toby was there; she was girlish and gauche, clowning. In honor of the occasion she'd made something ambitious for supper—enchiladas that had to be assembled and fried at the last minute—and then Toby mixed L.A.-style Martinis, which she said made her too drunk to cook safely. He had to fry the enchiladas, with a lot of flame and noise, under her laughing supervision, as she hung on to his shoulder. Heloise thought that her mother, despite her fierce feminism, actually preferred the company of men, powerful men. Women's winding approaches to one another, all the encouraging and propitiating, made her impatient; she'd rather be up against men's bullishness, their frank antagonism—she had even enjoyed sparring with Richard. And Angie liked the way Toby made fun of her radicalism, as if she were some kind of Trotskyite firebrand extremist, while she accused him of selling out; they had this teasing, challenging rapport. Still, it was notable that he'd chosen to live thousands of miles away from her.

Heloise had thought that she might speak to them about Delia. Perhaps her mother could tell her something that would make it clear, at least, whether this was the right Delia. But she was surprised, once she was inside her old home, at her reluctance to mention her discovery. She could imagine Angie taking Delia up, inviting her round to talk, celebrating her, the pair of them growing close, bound together by their long-ago disaster. Or Angie might be scathing, and recoil from making any new connection with those days. So, when Heloise told them about Jemima's Suzuki class, she didn't mention the teacher's name. Angie loved the idea of Jemima communicating through her violin. She was an inspired, enthusiastic grandmother, throwing herself into her grandchildren's world, siding with them and seeing everything at their eye level; also fretting to Heloise and Mair, when Toby wasn't there, about the teen-age son he had in the U.S. and never saw, from a marriage that hadn't lasted a year. Mair complained that Angie had reinvented herself over the decades. "You'd think now that she was some kind of hippie earth mother, dedicated to her offspring. Which isn't exactly the childhood I remember."

Inevitably, they talked about politics in America; Toby knew a lot, in his laconic, disparaging way. Watching out for totalitarianism, they said, everyone had been oblivious to the advent of the illiberal democracies. And what did it mean for the world, if America's com-

TRANSPIRATIONS

Leafing branches of a back-yard plum—

branches of water on a dissolving ice sheet—

chatter of magpies when you approach—

lilacs lean over the road, weighted with purple blossoms—

then the noon sun shimmers the grasses—

you ride the surge into summer—

smell of piñon crackling in the fireplace—

blued notes of a saxophone in the air—

not by sand running through an hourglass but by our bodies igniting—

passing in the form of vapors from a living body—

this world of orange sunlight and wildfire haze—

world of iron filings pulled toward magnetic south and north—

pool of quicksilver when you bend to tie your shoes—

standing, you well up with glistening eyes—

have you lived with utmost care?—

have you articulated emotions like the edges of leaves?—

adjusting your breath to the seasonal rhythm of grasses—

gazing into a lake on a salt flat and drinking, in reflection,
the Milky Way—

—Arthur Sze

pass was no longer set to liberal? But it had never really been set there in the first place, Angie protested. Toby played them his latest music, then went hunting upstairs in a cupboard for a box of cassette tapes from his youth, and came down with a quiz game and a cricket bat. He tried to make them play the game, but too many questions referred to TV stars and football contests they'd forgotten—in fact, to a whole vanished world of perception. Heloise told awful stories about Richard; there was such relief in not having to defend him to her family any longer. By eleven o'clock, Angie was drained, done for. This was something she had to get used to, she said, now that she was an old woman. Weariness came rattling down all at once in her mind, like a metal shutter across a window, peremptory and imperative, so that she had to go to bed. "But I wish that you'd really begin to be an old woman!" Heloise joked, placating her. "It's about time. Shouldn't you be knitting? You're meant to be tedious and repetitive by now. With a nice perm."

"Toby thinks I'm tedious and repetitive already."

Angie couldn't help flirting with her son, wanting his reassurance. Cruelly, Toby smiled back at her, implacable. And she did look old at that moment, under the bright kitchen light, despite her lovely, careless dress with its zigzag print: the loose skin on her face was papery, her shoulders were bowed, her skull shone through her thinning hair. Heloise couldn't help wanting, whatever Mair said, to deflect her mother's attention from certain hard truths. She asked if there was a copy anywhere of Clifford's book; Angie stood blinking and absent from herself, as if she had no idea what Heloise meant. "Whose book?"

"Dad's book. 'The Whatsit of Contemporary Capitalism.'"

"Oh, *that* book. Good God. I've no idea. Why? You can't seriously be entertaining the idea of reading it?"

"I just thought suddenly that I never have."

Toby said that there was a whole box of them, under the bed in his old room. "They're a bit mummified, sort of shrunken and yellow."

"You can have all of them if you want, darling," Angie said. "Get rid of them for me."

"I don't want all of them. I only want one copy."

When Angie had gone to bed, Toby asked why Heloise wanted the book anyway, and she said that she'd been thinking about their father. He rumpled her hair affectionately; in childhood games, she'd been her brother's faithful squire, in awe of his glamour as he advanced ahead of her into life, knowing all the things she didn't know. "I thought I went with Mum to France," she said, "after Dad's accident. But she told me no."

"Why would you have gone?" Toby said. "None of us went. We had to stay with that ghastly family, the Philipses, and they were sanctimonious and sorry for us. I got drunk for the first time on their bottle of gin, really sick drunk, threw up all over their stair carpet, and they couldn't even be mad with me, under the circumstances. I can remember thinking at the time—this is awful, really, considering that Dad was dying—that from now on, under the circumstances, I could get away with just about anything."

Heloise said she'd been convinced, though, that she'd seen their dad in the hospital. "He looked so peacefully asleep, without his glasses: you know, how he

"He thought the creature seemed more conciliatory of late."

• •

was never peaceful in his life." It was awful to think, she added, that their mother had travelled all alone to France.

"She wasn't alone. She had her boyfriend with her."

"What boyfriend?"

"Terry? Jerry? That guy who kept his furniture here to sell it. I couldn't stand him."

"I'd forgotten about him. But that was just a business relationship—he wasn't her boyfriend."

"Oh, yes, he was."

Toby said that he'd once come across Angie "doing it," as he put it, in his mocking, slangy drawl, with the stripped-pine dealer; this was in Clifford and Angie's bed, before the accident. Heloise was shocked and didn't want to believe it; but probably that sex scene was the kind of thing you couldn't make up, unlike a picture of your dead father at peace. And she did remember vaguely that Toby had fought with the furniture dealer, at some point in that awful time after Clifford's death—a real physical fight, fisticuffs, here in this very kitchen. Toby said that effectively he'd won the fight, although Terry had knocked him down. Because it didn't look good, did it? Big beefy macho bloke beating up a skinny weak kid, his girlfriend's kid, making his nose bleed. Angie hadn't liked it. They hadn't seen much of Terry after that.

Heloise began reading "Rites of Passage in Contemporary Capitalist Societies" as soon as she got home that night. She seemed to hear her father's own voice—which she hadn't even realized she'd forgotten—right in her ear, urgent and confiding. This sense of Clifford's closeness made her happy, just as it used to when she was small and he read to her at bedtime, or told her stories about his family or from history—she understood only years later that he'd never really been to Kiev or Berlin or Moscow. He hadn't censored these stories or tamed them to make them suitable for a child; he'd called her his little scholar. His good moods couldn't be trusted, though; he would come storming out of his study, ranting at the children if they made any noise when he was trying to write. Didn't they care about his work, or believe it was important? Now Heloise was reading the actual words he'd written, describing the barrenness of life under consumer capitalism, the loss of the meaning that was once created through shared belief and ritual. And she seemed to see through the words, with miraculous ease, to the flow of her father's thought.

When she picked up the book again, however, over her coffee the next morning, while she waited for Richard to bring back the children, she got bogged down in its technical language: "the significance of changing notions of value for the development of a capitalist economy," or "the process of differentiation makes sense if we see it as a continuous process of negotiation." It would take a huge mental effort on her part to even begin to master Clifford's ideas, and she wasn't convinced, in her daylight self, that it was worth it. She was afraid that, as the years had passed, the relevance of his formulations might have slipped away, as relevance had slipped from Toby's quiz. The book's pages had an unread, depressing smell. In the end, she lent it to Antony: he was better with that kind of writing than she was. If he felt like dipping into it, she said, she'd be interested to hear whether he thought it was any good. She liked to think of Antony having her book in his safekeeping.

Then, one stormy Thursday morning in half term, Heloise turned up unannounced at Antony's house with Solly and Jemima. She had rung to ask him if they could come round, but his phone was switched off; in desperation, she'd decided to take a chance, drive over anyway. It had rained every day of the holiday so far, Richard was away, and Heloise had given up inventing things to do; often the children were still in pajamas at teatime. Rain came sluicing across the big windows of their flat, the conifers thrashed at the end of the garden, wheelie bins blew over. The rooms were like caves inside the noise of water, either greenish and spectral or bleak with the lights on in the middle of the day; the children crouched over their screens, whose colors flickered on their faces. Jemima accompanied back-to-back episodes of "Pet Rescue" on her violin; Solly played his Nintendo until he was glazed and drugged, shrugging Heloise off impatiently if she tried to touch him. The idea of Antony's ordered home was a haven in her imagination. He would be struggling to keep up with his work while at home with his children, just as she was; only he was better at it, better at everything. His boys at this very moment, she thought, would be making art, or laughing at an old film. When An-

tony saw her, he'd know that she'd been trying her best, that the dreary shirtdress she'd put on was meant to be domestic and sensible. She thought that it was time to make some offer of herself, to find a way to express how she wanted him.

His front door was down some stone steps, in a narrow basement area crowded with bikes, and tubs planted with herbs and shrubs; the muscular gray trunk of a wisteria wound up from here, branching across the whole front of the house. Heloise was worried—once they'd rung the bell and were waiting in the rain, which splashed loudly in the enclosed stone space—at not hearing the children inside. She didn't know what to do if Antony wasn't in. She was counting on him. Then the door opened and Delia stood there, in a gray wool dressing gown and nice red Moroccan leather slippers. She had those weathered, easy looks that are just as good in the morning, without makeup; she seemed taken aback when she saw Heloise, and, for one confused, outraged moment, Heloise thought that Delia's dismay was because she'd been caught out—Antony and Delia had been caught out together—in something forbidden and unforgivable. She knew perfectly well, in the next moment, that there was nothing forbidden about it. Antony could do what he liked. He didn't belong to her.

"Delia, it's you! Is Antony home?"

"He just popped out to buy bread for our breakfast. I thought you were him, coming back."

"Breakfast! Gosh, we've been up for hours."

Heloise knew how absurd she sounded, accusing them. "Where are the boys?"

The boys were with Antony's mother, not due back till after lunch. Heloise had blundered into what should have been a lazy lovers' breakfast: fresh rolls, butter, honey, scrolling through the news with sticky fingers, sharing stories. Imagining it, she was stricken with longing. Her children had been counting on their visit, too: Jemima, whining, pressed her snotty face into Heloise's thigh; Solly kicked at the wall and swore. "I *knew* there was no point in driving over."

"You'd better come in," Delia said. "I'll make coffee."

"You don't want visitors. We're the last thing you want."

"But you'd better come in. We ought to talk."

Heloise still thought that Delia meant they should talk about whatever was happening between her and Antony. The children were squeezing past her already, shedding wet coats, dropping to the floor in the hall to tug off their Wellingtons, making a show of their eager compliance with house rules. Solly would be relishing the prospect of playing Max's games without Max; Jemima was in a phase of exploring other people's houses—she could spend hours staring into their cupboards and drawers, touching everything inside carefully, one item at a time. When Heloise followed Delia into the kitchen, she saw Clifford's book on the table. Delia stood facing her, with her hand on the book, in a gesture that was almost ceremonial.

"If this is your father," Delia said, "it makes a strange connection between us."

At some point later, Heloise told her mother the whole story, though not about Delia moving in with Antony, not yet, in case her mother guessed that she'd had hopes herself. "There was no tree," she said. "Apparently they spun across two lanes and smashed into a lorry coming the other way. Delia doesn't remember this, but it's what they told her. You made up the tree. And it was Delia, after all, who was the lover; it wasn't the other one. The other one died."

Angie sat listening stiffly, cautiously, as if there were something bruising and dangerous in this news for her, even after all this time. "So what's she like, then, the lover-girl?"

Heloise said that she was hardly a girl. She wanted to say that Delia was cold and shallow and selfish, but she couldn't. "She's pretty tough. She's made a life for herself. I like her—she's a survivor."

"What does she look like? Is she scarred? I hope so."

She wasn't scarred, Heloise said, as far as she could see.

Delia has never been able to remember anything from the time she and Clifford and Barbie set out for France until she woke up in hospital. Or just about woke up—into a long dream of pain, in which she was the prisoner of enemies speaking some alien language that was neither English nor French. Slowly, slowly, she'd come back from the dead. And now, after all these years, she can scarcely remember Clifford, either, or why he once seemed essential to her happiness. A few things: that he was overexuberant when making love, as if he was anxious to impress. That he was moved to tears when she played Brahms, though he argued that it was all up for nineteenth-century music. And the soft cleft shape of his chin, revealed when he shaved off his beard, disconcerting, as if a third person, younger and more tentative, were in the bed alongside them. They had met at a concert: he was a friend of the father of someone she knew from the Guildhall.

But she can remember getting ready, in the flat she shared with Barbie, that morning they left for France. Clifford was expected any moment, and Barbie was still packing, holding up one after another of the big-shouldered satiny dresses she wore, splashed with bright flower patterns, deciding which looked right for Paris, where she'd never been. Delia was anxious at the prospect of being without her violin for three whole days. She hardly thought about Clifford's wife and children; she discounted them—she was unformed and ignorant and very young, used to discounting whatever got in the way of her music. Was Delia sure, Barbie worried, that it was all right for her to travel with them? Didn't Delia and Clifford want to be alone together? Barbie promised to make herself scarce as soon as they got to Paris.

Delia wanted Barbie to come. Perhaps she was beginning to be tired of Clifford. Or perhaps she wanted to show off her grownup lover to Barbie, who hadn't met him, or to show off Barbie to Clifford, have him see what lively, attractive friends she had. Barbie wasn't a musician; she was a primary-school teacher. She was a voluptuous blonde, effervescent and untidy, with thick calves and ankles, always in trouble because of her no-good boyfriends, or because she drank too much, or fell out over school policy with her head teacher. Climbing up onto the bed now, she was holding one of her dresses in front of her, singing and pretending to dance the cancan. In Delia's memory, the window is open that morning in her bedroom, it's early spring, she's happy. The slanting low sunlight is dazzling in her dressing-table mirror. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Tessa Hadley on what happened next.

THE ART WORLD

OUT OF TIME

Mortality and the Old Masters.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

We will have so much to say to one another when the coronavirus crisis is over: distillations from solitude, in cases like mine. At seventy-eight, with bad lungs, I'm holed up with my wife at our country place until a vaccine is developed and becomes available. It's boring. (Remember when we lamented the distracting speed of contemporary life?) On the scale of current human ordeals, as the pandemic destroys lives and livelihoods, mere isolation hardly ranks as a woe. It's an ambivalent condition that, among other things, affords time to think long thoughts. One of mine turns to the art in the world's now shuttered museums: inoperative without the physical presence of attentive viewers. Online "virtual tours" add insult to injury, in my view, as strictly spectacular, amorphous disembodiments of aesthetic experience. Inaccessible, the works conjure in the imagination a significance that we have taken for granted. Purely by existing, they stir associations and precipitate meanings that may resonate in this plague time.

Why does the art of what we term the Old Masters have so much more soulful heft than that of most moderns and nearly all of our contemporaries? (I place the cutoff between the murderous scourges of war that were witnessed by Francisco Goya and those that Édouard Manet, say, read about in newspapers.) I think the reason is a routine consciousness of mortality. Pandemic diseases and innumerable other causes of early death haunted day-to-day life, even for those creators who were committed to entertainment. Consider the heaps of bodies that accumulate in Shakespeare's tragedies: catharses of universal fear. The persistence of religion in art that was increasingly given to secular motives—Bible stories alternate with spiritually charged themes of Greek and Roman mythology—bespeaks this preoccupation. Deaths of children were a perpetual bane. Paintings of the Madonna and Child, most grippingly those by Giovanni Bellini, secrete Mary's foreknowledge of her son's terrible fate. The idea that God assumed flesh, suffered, and died was a stubborn consolation—Mary's to know and ours to take on faith or, if we're atheists, at least to marvel at as mythic poetry.

An ineffably sacramental nuance in paintings from the Dutch seventeenth century, which luxuriate in the ordinary existence of ordinary people, evokes the impermanence of human contentment. Never mind the explicitness of that time's memento mori, all the skulls and guttering candles. I am talking about an awareness that's invisible, but palpable, in Rembrandt's nights—his fatalistic self-portrait in the Frick Collection comes to mind—and in Vermeer's mornings, when a young wife might open a window and be immersed in delicate, practically animate sunlight. The peculiarly intense insouciance of a Boucher or a Fragonard—the sensuous frolics of France's ancien régime, immune to concern about absolutely anything disagreeable, including, God forbid, social unrest—protests, in favor of life, rather too much. (Young folk dallying at court provide the sole but turbulent drama in Fragonard's "The

ABOVE: SERGE BLOCH

Confidence teeters precariously in Diego Velázquez's "Las Meninas."

Progress of Love," a marvellous suite of paintings that is also at the Frick.) Only as the nineteenth century unfolds, with improvements in sanitation and other living conditions (for the rising middle classes, at least), does mortal insecurity wane—barring such episodic ravages as tuberculosis and syphilis, which, like AIDS a century later, could seem to the unaffected to be selective of their victims—and death start to become an inconvenience in the lives of other people.

Now, in our world of effective treatments for almost anything, death obtains at the extremes of the statistical and the anecdotal, apart from those we love, of course. People slip away, perhaps with the ripple of an obituary: celebrity news items. What with the dementias attendant on our remorselessly lengthened lives, many slip away before the fact. Cancer is an archipelago of hospital medicine, normalized across the land. (I have cancer, but with fading awareness of it as immunotherapy gives me an unexpected lease on continued life.) The twentieth century shifted our sense of mass death to the political: war, genocide, and other numerical measures of evil, lately focussed on terrorism, opiates, and guns. Our mourners are respected—and lavished with optimistic therapy, as an aspect of a zeal for mental hygiene that clears away each night's corpses before every workaday morning. We may well return to shallow complacency when the present emergency passes. (There's the baffling precedent of the 1918-19 influenza pandemic, which killed as many as a hundred million people, largely young, and left so little cultural trace.) But right now we have all convened under a viral thundercloud, and everything seems different. There's a change, for example, in my memory of Diego Velázquez's "Las Meninas" (1656), which is the best painting by the best of all painters.

In December, I spent most of two days studying "Las Meninas" during a visit to Madrid, when I believed that my end was near. I had set myself the task of ignoring all received theories about this voluminously analyzed masterpiece and, on the spot, figuring out its maddening ambiguities. It's big: more than ten feet high by about nine feet wide. Its hanging in the Prado allows for close inspection. (The picture's illusion of a space that is continuous with the one that you occupy can make you feel invited to walk into it.) The work's conundrums orbit the question of who—situated where in space and when in time—is beholding this placid scene in a large room at the court of the Hapsburg king (and Velázquez's employer) Philip IV which captures life-size presences with the instantaneity of a snapshot. The painter? But he's in the picture, at work on a canvas, with its back to us, that can only be "Las Meninas." Some characters, mildly startled, lock eyes with ours; others remain oblivious of us. (But who are we?) There's the riddle of a distant mirror that doesn't show what you would assume it shows.

Presuming to grasp the whole is like hazarding a unified theory of relativity and quantum physics. Despite ending as I had started—mystified—I congratulated myself on parsing evidence of the artist's chief ingenuity: a perspectival scheme that resolves at a viewing point not centered but offset to the right, face to face with a jowly dwarf and opposite Velázquez's rendered position to the left. (Speculations that he must have painted the scene with the aid of a large mirror requires one to believe, implausibly, that he and a number of other visibly right-handed characters were southpaws.) I was in aesthete heaven. But, three months on, marooned by fear of the virus, I'm interested by an abrupt shift in my attitude toward the painting: from lingering exhilaration to vertiginous melancholy. "Las Meninas" is tragic, as an apotheosis of confidence and happy expectation that teeters precariously—a situation that Velázquez couldn't have known at the time but which somehow, subliminally, he wove into his vision.

At the lower middle of the painting stands the stunningly pretty five-year-old Infanta Margarita Teresa, coolly self-possessed and attended by two maids. She is a vessel of dynastic hope, which proved not to be entirely misplaced. Unlike three other children of Philip IV and his queen (and niece), Maria Anna, she survived childhood, and, unlike her remaining sibling, a younger brother, she seems to have escaped the genetic toll of Hapsburg inbreeding. (When her brother ascended the throne, as Charles II, his ruinous disabilities, impotence among them, ended the dynasty in Spain, amid the country's steep decline as a European power.) Margarita Teresa lived to the ripe age of twenty-one, married off for diplomatic reasons, at the age of fifteen, to become the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire and to bear four children, only one of whom outlasted infancy. Her reputed charms did not include her vicious anti-Semitism. (She encouraged her husband, Leopold I, to expel Jews from Vienna and to convert the city's main synagogue into a church.) But the glory of her promise in "Las Meninas" suddenly casts, for me, a shadow of ambient and forthcoming death and disaster. There would never be another moment in the Spanish court so radiant—or a painting, anywhere, so good. It's the second to last of Velázquez's greatest works. He all but discontinued painting, in favor of taking on more prestigious court duties, and died in 1660, at sixty-one. Philip IV survived him by five years.

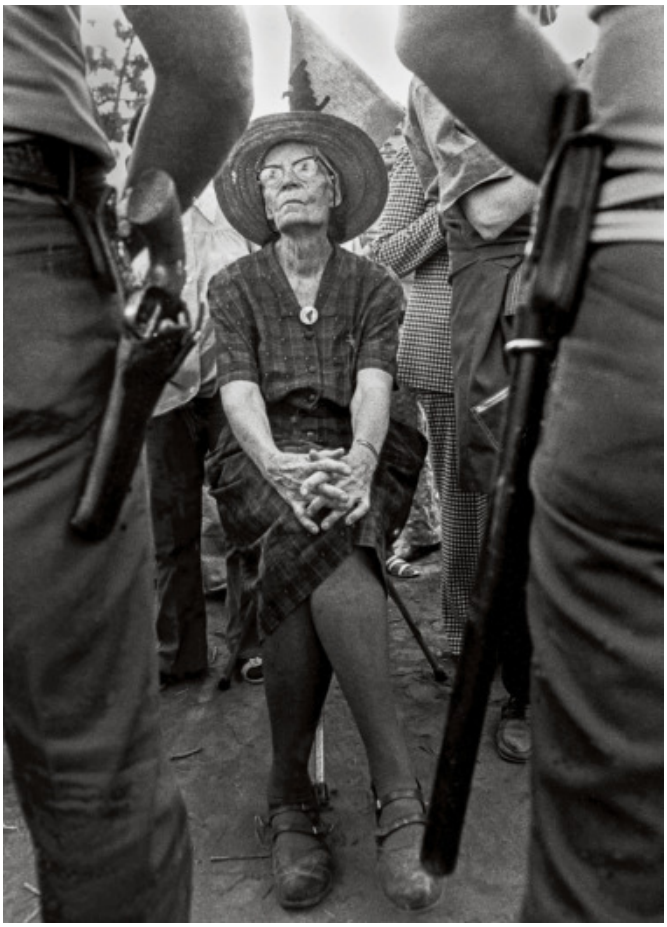
This sort of reëvaluation can happen when events disrupt your life's habitual ways and means. You may be taken not only out of yourself—the boon of successful work in every art form, when you're in the mood for it—but out of your time, relocated to a particular past that seems to dispel, in a flash of undeniable reality, everything that you thought you knew. It's not like going back to anything. It's like finding yourself anticipated as an incidental upshot of fully realized, unchanging truths. The impression passes quickly, but it leaves a mark that's indistinguishable from a wound. Here's a prediction of our experience when we are again free to wander museums: Everything in them will be other than what we remember. The objects won't have altered, but we will have, in some ratio of good and ill. The casualties of the coronavirus will accompany us spectrally. Until, inevitably, we begin to forget, for a while we will have been reminded of our oneness throughout the world and across time with all the living and the dead. The works await us as expressions of individuals and of entire cultures that have been—and vividly remain—light-years ahead of what passes for our understanding. Things that are better than other things, they may even induce us to consider, however briefly, becoming a bit better, too. ♦

BOOKS

A RADICAL FAITH

The life and legacy of Dorothy Day.

BY CASEY CEP



Day, devout and left-wing, believed we needed "a revolution of the heart."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation didn't know what to do about Dorothy Day. It was 1941, and Director J. Edgar Hoover was concerned about Day's onetime communism, sometime socialism, and all-the-time anarchism. After months of investigating—interviewing her known associates, obtaining her driving record and vital statistics, collecting her clips from newspaper morgues, and reviewing the first of her autobiographies, "From Union Square to Rome" ("an interesting, running account of the life of the authoress")—the F.B.I. decided that the subject of Bureau File 100-2403-1 would not need to be detained in the event of a national emergency. Day would have disagreed with them: not because she felt she was dangerous but because she knew that the nation was already in an emergency, and had been for some time.

The emergency was poverty, and Day had been alarmed by it her whole life. She first encountered it in the slums of Chicago, where she lived as a teen-ager, and she saw it all around her in New York City, where she moved after dropping out of college, and lived for more than six decades. Even before the Great Depression, Day had been sensitive to the plight of the poor, a sensitivity that ultimately shaped her calling. At thirty, she converted to Catholicism. In the years that followed, she started a radical newspaper and began opening what she called "houses of hospitality" for those who needed something to eat and somewhere to stay.

Eventually, Day's Catholic Worker Movement would serve the poor in more than two hundred communities. Under her guidance, it would also develop a curiously dichotomous political agenda, taking prophetic stands against racial segregation, nuclear warfare, the draft, and armed conflict around the world, while opposing abortion, birth control, and the welfare state. That dichotomy seems especially stark today, when most people's beliefs come more neatly packaged by partisan affiliation. But by the time she died, in 1980, Day had become one of the most prominent thinkers of the left and doers of the right. In her lifetime, it was the secularists—including Dwight Macdonald, in a two-part Profile published in this magazine, in 1952—who called Day a saint. Now, though, the cause of her sainthood is officially advancing within the Catholic Church, a development that has occasioned a new biography and a documentary, both of which explore the contentious question of who owns her legacy.

She wasn't sure if she was afraid of God or the ground, but the nightmares Dorothy Day had as a child featured a noise that got louder and nearer until she woke up sweaty and terrified. She had been born in New York, in 1897, but her family relocated to California in 1904, and they were living in Oakland two years later, when the San Francisco earthquake struck. That tragedy changed Day's life in two ways. First, it affirmed her preëxisting fears about annihilation, while simultaneously stirring in her a theory of mercy based on her mother's nightly reassurances and the broader response of collectivity and charity. Why, she wondered, couldn't the community care for all its members so generously the rest of the time? The second change was more pragmatic: her father, John, was a sportswriter who could barely support his wife and five children on his salary, so when the earthquake destroyed the press that printed his newspaper he moved the family again, this time to Chicago.

John and Grace, his wife, had been

married in a church, but they never took their children to worship. Even so, Dorothy, their middle daughter, was a pious child who read Scripture as ravenously as novels and watched with interest as her friends and their families prayed. At twelve, she demanded to be baptized at a nearby Episcopal church; in high school, she learned Greek and practiced her translation skills on the New Testament. She tested her way into a scholarship at the University of Illinois, where she matriculated not long after the socialist Eugene Debs got nearly a million votes in the 1912 Presidential election. Like many other students, she was drawn to the college Socialist Club, which is where she heard a lecture by Rose Pastor Stokes, a feminist who went on to help found the Communist Party of America.

Politics change like the weather, and this era of falling atmospheric pressure is nicely captured in "Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century," a new biography co-written by John Loughery and Blythe Randolph. It was the great age of "isms," especially on American campuses, and at first Day enthusiastically embraced them. Her family had always been financially marginal, and that left her receptive to all politics that prioritized the poor; at the same time, a rising atheism and anti-authoritarianism left her eager to cast off her religious faith, which her comrades regarded as risible. She joined a literary club called the Scribblers and submitted work to a magazine and a newspaper on campus, along with the local paper in Urbana–Champaign. Her writing was more impressive than her grades, which included an F in biology, so, when her family moved back to New York, Day dropped out and went with them.

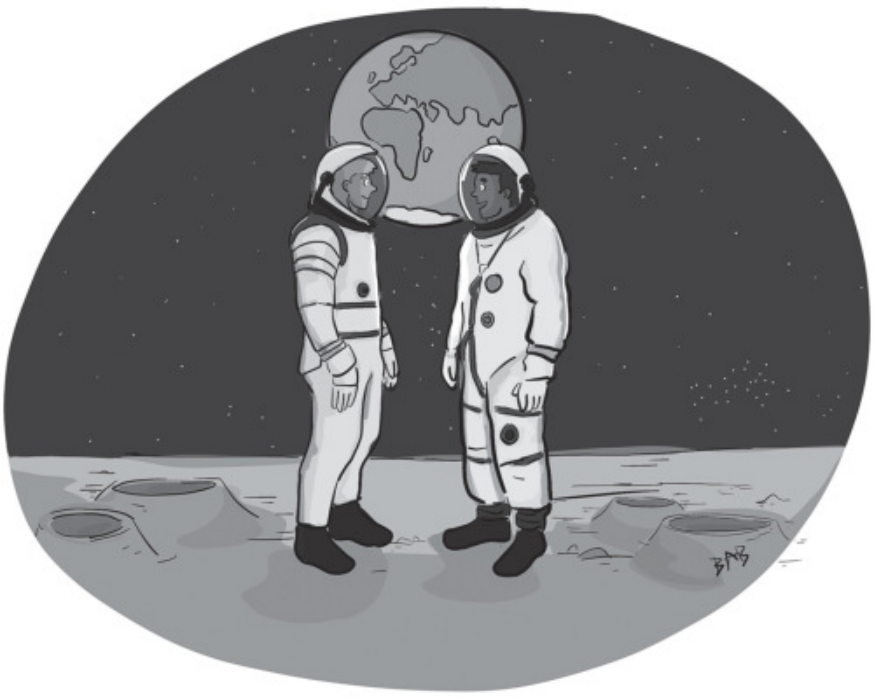
Day's father had helped her brothers find journalism jobs, but he refused to help her, so she was left to knock on the doors of papers around the city. When that failed, she remembered the alternative media and leftist publications she had learned about on campus, and found a job with the *Call*, a socialist daily in which her first byline appeared under the headline "Girl Reporter, with Three Cents in Her Purse, Braves Night Court." A few weeks later, she interviewed Leon Trotsky, who was then living in the Bronx. After that, she managed to craft a feature from a three-minute conversation with Margaret Sanger's sister, newly released from prison and desperate to drum up support for the American Birth Control League.

In between writing for every radical outlet in town, Day palled around with Marxists, got arrested for picketing the White House with the suffragists, and took a billy club in the ribs at an anti-war riot. "Bohemian" doesn't begin to describe Day's life in this period. Her drinking was legendary, even by Greenwich Village standards; the literary critic Malcolm Cowley claimed, in his memoir, that Day could hold her liquor better than most gangsters. Some of that drinking took place during Prohibition, and was thus illegal, and much of it took place at a bar alternately known as the Hell Hole and the Bucket o' Blood. Day's friends were all writing books or appearing in them, and she was said to be the model for characters in "The Malefactors," by her onetime roommate the novelist Caroline Gordon, and in "A Moon for the Misbegotten," by her onetime lover the playwright Eugene O'Neill.

Day herself wrote a book during this time: an autobiographical novel called "The Eleventh Virgin," published in 1924. It told the story of a disastrous affair she'd had with an older writer, which ended after she attempted suicide and had an illegal abortion, a procedure performed by an ex-boyfriend of the anarchist Emma Goldman. Day wrote the novel while honeymooning in Europe with a different man. The rebound ended no better than the previous relationship: one morning, Day took off her wedding ring, left it on the bureau, and walked out of the marriage.

She moved back to Chicago, where she took jobs in a department store, at a library, in a restaurant, and as an artist's model. Her employment was erratic, but her politics were consistent. When the Chicago police raided the Industrial Workers of the World boarding house, Day was there, and got arrested for prostitution—only because the police couldn't arrest people for socialism. She was released from jail a week later, and eventually made her way back to New York.

There Day fell in love with a man named Forster Batterham. After the abortion, she assumed that she could not have children, and so was astonished when she became pregnant, then awed by the birth of a daughter, Tamar Teresa, in 1926. Without consulting Batterham, an atheist, she stopped a nun on the street and asked to have the baby baptized. Plenty of new parents are inspired to return to religion, and Day would later write of how God had long



"I can't wait to get home, run around outside, and finally eat some fresh food."

PREVIOUS PAGE: BOB FITCH PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE / DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS / STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

haunted her life, but she could never fully explain why she was so suddenly and urgently drawn to Catholicism. The nun she stopped, Sister Aloysia Mary Mulhern, didn't agree to the baptism right away, because Day was not yet Catholic; over the next few months, the pair studied the catechism together, and talked about the faith into which the activist had become convinced that she and her daughter needed to be received.

Batterham did not believe in marriage, and, after converting to Catholicism, Day left him. Then she met someone else: a fellow-Catholic named Peter Maurin, who, although never romantically involved with Day, was, in the deepest sense, her soul mate. Maurin liked to call himself a French peasant but in reality he was equal parts philosopher, troubadour, and troublemaker. He had heard about Day from some other Catholic radicals and was waiting in her apartment when she came home one day in December, 1932. Most people would have called the police, but she listened patiently as he expounded on his many ideas and theories and dreams and programs and plans.

Day had just returned from covering the Communist Party's hunger march in Washington, D.C. What Maurin couldn't have known is that, before leaving the city, she had gone to the basilica at Catholic University and prayed to find a way to alleviate the suffering of the hungry. The country was three years into the Great Depression, and Day worried that her writing was not doing enough to help; it seemed obvious that Maurin was the answer to her prayer. She quickly agreed to the first of many of his ideas: a newspaper to serve the poor.

The first issue of the *Catholic Worker* came out on May Day, 1933, and asked, "Is it not possible to be radical and not atheist?" A religious press printed twenty-five hundred copies, and, at a time when the economy was so constricted that there were literally no new nickels and dimes in circulation, Day sold the paper for a penny each in Union Square. She had written most of its eight pages herself—arts coverage, exposés on child labor and racial discrimination, an article about the Scottsboro Boys going to trial, and a list of upcoming strikes for those who wanted to support the labor movement. The editors confessed that it wasn't "yet known whether it will be a monthly, a fortnightly, or a weekly," since they had no idea if any subscriptions or donations would follow.

Trusting in what Christ preached about the lilies of the field, Day and Maurin focussed on the present, letting God provide for their future. That didn't mean money wasn't an issue; it always was. They wouldn't hoard it, so an endowment was a nonstarter, and relying on government funds was anathema to them both, so they often went begging, which they felt helped them live in solidarity with those they served. Grocery bills, printer's bills, electric bills: they asked for money to pay them all, and for extensions or forgiveness when they could not. (Years later, when they faced a substantial fine from the city for the allegedly slumlike and hazardous conditions of their headquarters, the entire amount was paid by W. H. Auden.)

Day and Maurin sent the *Catholic Worker* to parishes and priests around the country, and it soon had a circulation of a hundred thousand. They published the paper monthly, and it became a mixture of articles that Day thought would promote and influence the political left and what Maurin called his "easy essays," prose poems that amounted to aphorisms: "The world would be better off / if people tried to become better. / And people would become better / if they stopped trying to become better off."

It was Maurin who began writing about how the early followers of Jesus had kept "Christ rooms" in their homes, offering rest and hospitality to strangers. He lamented the end of that culture of welcome, and implored priests and bishops to use their rectories and diocesan properties for such a purpose. With more than ten million Americans unemployed, more than half the country living below the poverty line, and two million people without homes, Maurin asked why the Catholic Church wasn't doing more to address the crisis. The newspaper had secured an office and enough of a budget that he and Day could occasionally rent apartments for people who had been laid off. But there were more than twenty thousand people living on the street in New York City alone, and the Catholic Workers, as the paper's writers and readers came to call themselves, knew that far more sweeping action was needed.

In the winter of 1934, Day and Maurin rented a four-story, eleven-bedroom building on Charles Street, the first of their hospitality houses. From the start, the Catholic Workers served the sorts of individuals even other social reformers might not have allowed through the door: the mentally ill, the drunk, the offensive, the disobedient, the ungrateful. When challenged by another Catholic activist about an encounter with a racist and anti-Semitic guest on Charles Street, Day said she would not remove him: "He, after all, is Christ." The man, an alcoholic with dementia, lived with the Catholic Workers until he died.

Within a few years, there were thirty-two hospitality houses, from Buffalo and Baltimore to St. Louis and Seattle. Day and Maurin continued to publish their newspaper and to organize for labor rights, racial integration, and radical equality. Hardly a protest took place in New York without at least a few Catholic Workers showing up. Not even the Bishop of Rome was spared: when the gravediggers of Calvary Cemetery went on strike against the trustees of St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Archbishop of New York, the workers supported them, including by picketing the office of the chancery. The Church hierarchy was even more vexed by Day's pacificism, which was so unpopular during the Second World War that the newspaper's circulation collapsed and Church officials tried to have "Catholic" removed from its title.

But Dorothy Day was always equal parts "Catholic" and "worker." Many followers of the Pope found her politics inconvenient and offensive; many leftists thought her faith oppressive and absurd. Day's family initially mistook her conversion for an emotional crisis, and her friends suspected that she had simply traded her political fanaticism for the religious variety; both camps were

surprised when it lasted. Had Day been an anodyne Protestant or an agnostic Unitarian, her spirituality would have raised fewer eyebrows, but she opted in to what many of her friends regarded as the most regressive and patriarchal institution outside of the federal government.

That government, by contrast, was somewhat assuaged by Day's religiosity. Part of what kept her F.B.I. file from getting any larger was the assurances offered by the very hierarchy her leftist friends so despised: as one agent noted, "Church officials believe her to be an honest and sincere Catholic." That was putting it mildly: Day took to the Rosary and the saints, the confession and the liturgy, the miracles and the sacraments as, to quote the psalmist, a deer longs for flowing streams. She felt that the Church had cured her alienation and isolation, drawing her into fellowship with a community of living souls. "We cannot love God," Day wrote in her memoir "The Long Loneliness," published in 1952, "unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more."

It wasn't all balm, though. Day had reservations about Catholic dogma, was dismayed by the faith's history of impieties and intolerance, and, above all, had no patience for its failures to live up to Christ's core teachings. Still, to her mind, her politics were not contradicted but confirmed by the Catholic Church, both in the Gospels and in two of the most consequential encyclicals of the post-industrial age. The first, Pope Leo XIII's 1891 "Rerum Novarum," praised labor unions and called for reforming capitalism, asserting that "some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class." The second, Pope Pius XI's "Quadragesimo Anno," delivered forty years later, affirmed the earlier teaching and called for a new economy based on solidarity and subsidiarity. Both encyclicals showed a respectful apprehension about the role of the state, believing that it should not interfere in the private lives of its citizens or usurp the moral authority of the Church. This explained Day's ongoing anarchism and her hostility to government welfare programs, which she pilloried as a "sop thrown to the proletariat."

To the socialists and communists who stood with Day on the picket lines and protested with her in front of statehouses and corporate headquarters, such teachings seemed as nonsensical as the Immaculate Conception. And her distance from would-be allies only increased during the sixties and seventies. Although she had been plenty countercultural in her own youth, she disapproved of the drug use, sexual promiscuity, and general disdain for authority that came with hippie culture. Many of the young people who showed up at the houses of hospitality—and at the kibbutz-like communal farms the Catholic Worker Movement tried to establish—did not even know who Day was, and they were as confounded as the old left had been by her joy in the ritual of worship and her solace in the habit of prayer. But what most alienated Day from her fellow-radicals was her conviction that what was needed was not a violent revolution but "a revolution of the heart," as she called it: an ability to see Christ in others, and to love others as God loves us.

As the years passed, faith and radicalism, which coexisted so seamlessly in Day herself, grew further and further apart in the outer world. The left wanted less heart and more revolution; the faithful, less revolution and more heart. Day wanted what she always had: justice for the poor and peace for all. There was an admirable consistency, perhaps even obstinacy, in much of her political life: in the nineteen-tens, she had picketed for suffrage; in the twenties and thirties, she had marched for the hungry; in the forties, she criticized the government for the internment of Japanese-Americans; in the fifties, she refused to participate in civil-defense drills and protested nuclear proliferation; in the sixties, she denounced the Vietnam War, inspiring the men of the Catholic Worker Movement to become the first in America to burn their draft cards; in the seventies (and in her seventies), she was standing with Cesar Chavez's farm laborers in California when she was arrested for the last time.

Yet, for almost every one of those stands, she took others that she or history or both later judged less kindly. Day defended the Catholic Church's sexual ethics at the ongoing expense of those who sought abortions like the one she'd had, needed the birth control she'd once used, were abused by their priests, or were discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. She opposed Social Security, believing it to be overreach by the state, then lived long enough to watch it save many senior citizens from financial ruin. She saw the atrocities of the Holocaust ended by the Allies through the global conflict she had opposed, and she witnessed the sufferings caused by the Cuban Revolution, which she had praised.

In the early years of the Catholic Worker Movement, Day joked that she wrote down how much money came in and how much money went out but never reconciled the two columns—which is more or less how she lived her life. Unfortunately, it also more or less describes Loughery and Randolph's biography: a comprehensive, chronological account that never arrives at a meaningful summation of the life it chronicles. It doesn't go much beyond what has been written before: by Day herself in her memoirs; in collections of her letters and diaries, carefully edited by Robert Ellsberg, the managing editor of the *Catholic Worker* in the late seventies and the son of the Pentagon Papers whistle-blower; and in the biographies "Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty" (Scribner), by her youngest granddaughter, Kate Hennessy, and "Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion" (Da Capo Press), a perceptive portrait by the Catholic Worker turned psychiatrist Robert Coles.

A more compelling addition to the many studies of Day is Martin Doblmeier's new documentary, "Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story," the latest in his "Prophet Voices" series, which has already featured films about the theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Howard Thurman. (The movie aired on PBS last month and is now available on PBS.org.) Admiring without being hagiographic—an obvious temptation with the life of a putative saint—it's a fine example of what Day herself was always extolling: a kind of personalist experience whereby our hearts are changed not by airtight argument or moral perfection but by direct encounters with human needs and those who rise to meet them.

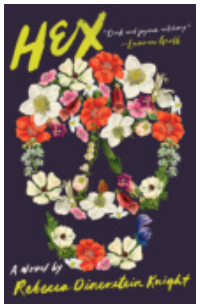
Both the documentary and the bi-

ography attempt to sate the curiosity of a public newly aware of Day because of the effort to have her sainted. Not everyone is pleased by that possibility. Loughery and Randolph write that some conservatives are "horrified at the prospect of canonizing a woman who had an abortion and a child out of wedlock and who condemned capitalism far more frequently and vehemently than she condemned Marxism-Leninism," while some progressives "fear the loss of her radical edge," believing that sainthood "would be antithetical to her very uninstitutional, anti-hierarchical approach to spiritual growth and social change."

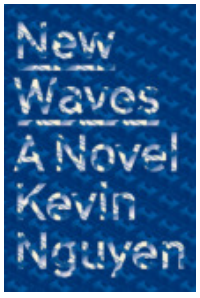
That controversy reflects the continuing animosity between the two central aspects of Day's identity. The Catholic Worker Movement still exists, with nearly two hundred houses of hospitality around the world and a newspaper that is still published and sold for a penny (plus postage if you take it by mail), and it still evangelizes for the "personalist" approach—those revolutions of the heart. But Day's influence is also felt in the Democratic Socialists of America, the insurgent political organization that was founded in the nineteen-seventies by Michael Harrington, who had been an editor at the *Catholic Worker* in the early fifties, but who left after losing his faith. He went on to publish "The Other America: Poverty in the United States," which became the basis for John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. Unlike Day, who fought for suffrage but never voted, the D.S.A. has poured a great deal of its energy into electoral politics to change not only hearts, but parties and systems.

Needless to say, neither approach, personalist or structural, has succeeded. Even before the coronavirus devastated our economy and added millions to the unemployment rolls, half a million Americans were homeless, twenty-seven million lacked health insurance, thirty-eight million lived in poverty, and forty million relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which the current Administration is trying to cut. In the face of that national emergency, one suspects that Day would insist that no one is the rightful owner of her legacy, because, as yet, no one has fulfilled it. Stop talking about me, she'd almost certainly say, and start talking about the poor. ♦

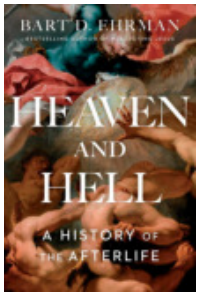
BRIEFLY NOTED



Hex, *by Rebecca Dinerstein Knight (Viking).* This swift-moving, sardonic novel follows Nell, a botanist, as she navigates the fallout of her expulsion from graduate school, owing to the accidental death of a colleague. Although Nell's research career ends prematurely, she persists in nurturing her interest in poisonous plants by cultivating them in her apartment. She also remains obsessed with her academic adviser, who is otherwise occupied—by her husband's affair with Nell's best friend, and, soon enough, by her own affair with Nell's ex-boyfriend. Dinerstein Knight paints a withering portrait of this web of toxic romances, and of the excesses of academia, while illustrating how both the heart and the mind can be broken and reshaped by changing circumstances.



New Waves, *by Kevin Nguyen (One World).* In this début novel, two disgruntled tech workers—Margo, the sole black woman engineer at her firm, and Lucas, the only Asian-American non-engineer—form an odd couple whose plan to steal their employer's customer data is derailed when Margo is killed in a car accident. Lucas moves to a rival startup, where he moderates its Snapchat-like service (designed to abet whistleblowers, it is instead frequented by sexting teen-agers), and sifts through Margo's digital remains in the form of chatroom transcripts and WAV files. While satirizing the tech world's social mores, Nguyen also unearths the biases that govern our digital infrastructure, which are omnipresent in everything from the algorithm behind Pac-Man to the underpinnings of surveillance technology.



Heaven and Hell, *by Bart D. Ehrman (Simon & Schuster).* This elegant history explores the evolution of the concept of the afterlife in Western thought. Tracing its development over several millennia—from the dusty land of the dead in the Epic of Gilgamesh to Virgil's Elysium and Dante's Paradiso—Ehrman delves into the messy processes that gave rise to doctrines like Purgatory and bodily resurrection. Well-trod subjects are presented with engaging clarity, and more contentious theories are laid out carefully. Examining why certain concepts have proved so durable while others have fallen away, Ehrman asserts that humanity's visions of the afterlife speak to its deepest "needs and aspirations."

Three Brothers, *by Yan Lianke, translated from the Chinese by Carlos Rojas (Grove).* This memoir of growing up during the Cultural Revolution focusses on Yan's memories of his family: his father, who toiled in their field; his elder uncle, who sold home-made socks and wore a jacket covered with patches; and his younger uncle, thought to be the one who got away, who worked long shifts at a cement factory. Yan recalls both the immense pleasure brought by simple luxuries—candies, sweet potatoes, a shiny polyester shirt—and the initial allure of the city, where life seemed to have meaning beyond the repetition of the harvest and building tile-roofed houses for one's children to get married in. He left, eventually settling in Beijing, only to yearn for his ancestral land.

READING THE SIGNS

Joyelle McSweeney and the poetry of catastrophe.

BY DAN CHIASSON

In McSweeney's work, ambient horror turns into devastating personal loss.

The American poet Joyelle McSweeney's new book, "Toxicon and Arachne," is actually two books, bound as one and yoked together by disaster. In "Toxicon," written while carrying her third child, McSweeney imagines her body as a poisonous, dangerous host, a "nest of scum" or a "jet engine" with a "stork torso" caught inside it. The world that awaits the child is equally, extravagantly lethal: "factory hens" carry "their viral load" while the "zika mosquito" dips its "improbable proboscis / into the human layer / and vomits an inky toxin." The poems are written in a frightening, crusty impasto, the hard "T" and "x" and "c" of the title mutating from one phrase to another. "Arachne," the sequel, is named for the child, "8 pounds, black hair, and a heart shoved aside by its guts," who died tragically after her "odd allocation of thirteen days." McSweeney fears that she will "hemorrhage rage," then "lie down where all the hemorrhages start. & cremate the house & collapse on the street." "Toxicon" is poetry dragged into the pit of a nightmare; "Arachne" is its unbearable, almost unthinkable, coda.

McSweeney, who teaches at the University of Notre Dame, has published three previous books of poetry, plus novels, stories, verse plays, and a critical text that helps define her own practice, "The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults." In necropastoral space, she has written, nature is "poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill effects and affects." The words of the living commingle sickeningly with those of the dead. All poets write in language exhumed in part from their ancestors; in McSweeney's work, prior language takes hold of a poem by seepage or contamination, in the stealthy way that "bugs, viruses, weeds and mold" do, going about their relentless work. As occult ideas about poetry go, McSweeney's is surprisingly grounded: poetry isn't a séance, as it was for Yeats or James Merrill; it's a biohazard, teeming with linguistic contagion.

The power of McSweeney's work cannot be separated from its association with forms of oracle and soothsaying, and so it is uncanny that it should arrive in the middle of a global pandemic. Her style is created by loosing outbreaks of sound, and then containing them on the page. "Toxic Sonnets: A Crown for John Keats" is a cascade of fourteen fourteen-line poems, set in motion when McSweeney reads about "the tubercle" that killed Keats on a screen whose glow "wrap[s] the motel room in light." A "crown" of sonnets—an old form, now again in vogue—is a kind of regulated excess: the last line of each poem spills over and often becomes the first line of the next. It's the perfect form to suggest a spiralling, obsessive Internet rabbit hole, and its final section is a scary tour de force of open tabs. In the face of death, "life converts its currency":

> dollar bill: killfloor: T-cell: chemical spill:
> gyre: fire bred to sink its tooth in bone and
> breed
> its own accelerant: rude, encamera'd
> predator drone: thousand-pleated lace rill
> at the throat: rouge to make the corpse look
> flush
> with cash or lust: best guest: grave
> communicant: data drill or bank or dump:
> plastic
> asp that guides the chemo to the lump:

"Relations stop nowhere," Henry James wrote; but McSweeney's fourteen-line boxes organize them, as do her unsettling rhymes and manic puns. The line breaks create both recursive and propulsive meanings: "breed," a

ILLUSTRATION BY ANJA SLIBAR

noun when it's part of the phrase "bone and breed," becomes a verb when it's stitched to the phrase "its own accelerant"; "flush," which means either rich or full of blood, can imply "cash or lust." Some poets strain for these effects. McSweeney, inundated by them, uses form to manage the flood. In "Bio Pic," a scroll of phrases seems generated by unconscious associations, or by eerie best-guess technologies like autocorrect and predictive text:

> delete the fun
> -ction til it hangs on air
> lazy as a fan
> in erased place

The poem suggests the lurching way that we write now, sometimes in tune with, and often in opposition to, what our devices assume about us: "potentate / pomegranate / palm or pomade / handgrenade." The alternatives seem to pop up almost of their own irritating volition.

A writer of McSweeney's intense receptivity suffers the onslaught of her style almost as a series of physical blows. The violence, the catastrophe, the Technicolor hellscapes are nearly too much to bear. "Toxicon" is babyproofing in an apocalypse: the fact of McSweeney's pregnancy rings out from every lethal detail. She is shaken by the thought of snuff sites, crime-scene photographs, and grim hospital tableaux. The mind that cannot unhear the echo of "handgrenade" in "pomegranate" races ahead to macabre visions of freak accidents, as "when the teenager seizes in the driveway, her hatchback / glides down into traffic on its own."

"Arachne" begins with an omen: training her eye to her daughters' level, McSweeney sees that the sidewalks are full of "kinetic sand" (a vaguely radioactive-seeming substance that was a brief fad toy) "in place of smashed robin's eggs." The idiolect that McSweeney perfected for all-over, ambient horror must now zero in on a loss so targeted and personal that it feels, at times, like a sick prank. "Was it for this," she asks, echoing the same question Wordsworth put to himself in "The Prelude," that "even the unready man" has become "catastrophe's host"? A box of Dreft, the baby soap, becomes a portent of the child's death. ("What a name for a baby soap: dread plus bereft.") The passage that follows is imaginative play of the darkest possible cast:

> O rose O ruined map of clots do not
> open your eyes for me now
> when we are even now preparing you for
> Dreft
> preparing to take the tomb out
> I mean the tube and
> wheel you away in your
> plastic bassinet

I suspect that people who have lost an infant will find in "Arachne" a world of forensic detail they never thought would make its way into poetry, and some may wish it hadn't. I can imagine it only because McSweeney wrote these poems, with their curdled, ruined anti-joy, a sorrow too sudden and new to be called by the name of grief. The chemicals that created anticipation in the brain for months still pool in the aftermath of tragedy. The crib and the "cheerful wallpaper," the Dreft and the diapers could all belong in the photo cloud or Instagram feed of a happy parent. Instead, here they are, in an elegy.

"Catastrophe what crowns me," McSweeney writes. "What makes me survive." The costs, though, are exorbitant. "I summon all mine vanity," she writes, employing the beautiful, archaic English borrowed from the ghost presences that circulate throughout her poems (Keats, Anne Bradstreet, Sir Thomas Browne, and so many others):

> and crash my plane
> into the abandoned nursery
>
> & break my brainstorm down
> I mean my brainstem
> starved of oxygen
> eating itself
> emitting its bleat
> like a nameless weed
> on the edge of the galaxy
> fringing the galaxy's cunt
> in that wrecked room

The kamikaze fantasy arises, like everything in this frightening and brilliant book, not from a pleasant "brainstorm" but from the animal reflexes of the "brainstem." The defeat is total: a rout, a blowout. Now that the tables have been permanently turned, "the popsong plays" on "the toy turntable" in the nursery and also—you can hear the faint pun—"in eternity." ♦

PROMOTION

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ON TELEVISION

WILD THINGS

"Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness," on Netflix.

BY DOREEN ST. FÉLIX

Who deserves the directing credit for "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness," which, in the long last week of March, became Netflix's most popular title? The answer isn't straightforward. True, it was the documentarians Eric Goode and Rebecca Chailkin, along with a team of presumably traumatized editors, who tamed five years' worth of footage, new and found, into this outrageous and outrageously viewable seven-part true-crime series. But the subject of "Tiger King," Joseph Maldonado-Passage, who was born Joseph Schreibvogel and goes by Joe Exotic, is at least as responsible for bringing a unity of vision to the show.

I might have passed over "Tiger King" had not so many memes appeared on my timeline, including one, framed as a "coming out of quarantine" fantasy, in which Exotic, pacing with the aid of a crutch, a big cat behind him, says, matter-of-factly, "I'm broke as shit," and "I've had some kinky sex. I have tried drugs." Eyes circled with kohl, silver hoops like binder rings in his lobes, Exotic is a Scheherazade of country Oklahoma stock, a lonely cult leader in the fetching getup of a zookeeper. He is also an outsider artist with an ability to hold hostage many species—big cats, boyfriends and husbands, employees and documentarians.

"Tiger King," a kaleidoscope of terrible taste, is prestige trash.

Goode, a wealthy conservationist, once ran his own menagerie, the infamous Manhattan night club Area, where he partied with Madonna, Warhol, and Basquiat in the eighties. Goode and Chailkin were originally planning to make a film about the underworld of endangered-animal smugglers when, in 2014, as they searched for collectors of rare reptiles in Florida, other charismatic megafauna caught their attention. As Goode recently told *Rolling Stone*, "What fascinated Rebecca and I was the 'Best in Show' aspect, where the people are almost more interesting than the exotic animals they're keeping." Goode's choice of inspirational comparison—a mockumentary—is telling; in "Tiger King," from the edge of the frame, he delights in the near-unbelievable eccentricities of his subjects. "Oh, she's dressed perfectly," he murmurs when Exotic's nemesis, Carole Baskin, the proprietor of Big Cat Rescue, a Florida animal sanctuary, first appears, draped in her signature leopard print.

The World Wildlife Fund estimates that there may be more tigers living in captivity in the U.S. than in the wild. The creatures at Exotic's Garold Wayne Zoo, a park near Wynnewood, Oklahoma, are caged and fed roadkill; the employees, among them drifters fed on Walmart dumpster meat, fare about as well. There is a dark comedy in the documentary's elliptical form, which pairs older footage of Exotic's acolytes alongside more contemporary interviews. Since leaving Exotic, John Finlay, Exotic's former husband, who is inexplicably shirtless in interviews, has had his pelvis tattooed—"Privately Owned Joe Exotic," in large script—covered up. Human suffering is dangled before the viewer like raw meat; one former animal handler has a missing forearm that goes, for an agonizing forty-eight minutes, unmentioned.

Rick Kirkham, a former reporter for "Inside Edition," decamped to the G.W. Zoo to shoot what he and Exotic hoped would be a hit reality show, "Joe Exotic, Tiger King." "He was like a mythical character living out in the middle of bumfuck Oklahoma," Kirkham says. Kirkham's cast might also have included Exotic's fellow-zookeeper Bhagavan (Doc) Antle, a burly tiger enthusiast who styles himself as a guru, and who, depending on whom you ask, has three,

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL WINDLE

four, five, or nine much younger wives; and Mario Tabraue, a Cuban man in late middle age who ran a cocaine ring, went to prison for racketeering, and is supposedly the inspiration for Tony Montana in "Scarface." ("I sold drugs to maintain my animal habit," Tabraue says at one point.)

The reality show struggled, Kirkham explains, because Exotic would not relinquish control over his own story. (Most of the footage was lost in a mysterious fire.) In "Tiger King," too, Exotic exploits himself before anyone else can, spinning his biography—the closeted youth; the suicide attempt; the flight from home; the adoption of wild animals as a surrogate family—into an affecting queer tragedy. Authenticity, for Exotic, is an ouroboros of performance. In the second episode, after we are shown the gruesome footage that explains that missing forearm, we watch as Exotic, who has found the time to put on a shiny E.M.S. bomber jacket, visits the G.W. gift shop. "Ladies and gentlemen, before you hear it on the news, I'm gonna tell you myself," he says to his customers in the manner of an m.c., before informing them that an employee has been mauled.

The plot of "Tiger King" centers on the battle between Exotic and Baskin. She campaigns for the closure of the G.W. Zoo; Exotic films himself shooting at dummies he has named Carole. Exotic is convinced that, in the nineties, Baskin murdered her husband and, perhaps, fed him to her tigers. She denies the accusations with a bemused grin while pretending to tolerate her current husband, Howard, who follows her around like a needy pet. Unfortunately for the Baskins, "Tiger King" remains loyal to its eponymous subject, and footage is mercilessly edited to make her seem like a hippie murderess. At one point, on learning that one of Exotic's employees might have tried to have him killed by spraying perfume on his shoes before he entered a tiger cage, she counters, without missing a beat, that sardine oil would have been more effective.

Chailkin and Goode are less interested in getting to the truth of the matter than in revelling in their subjects' chintzy vanity projects: Baskin's YouTube channel ("Hey, all you cool cats and kittens"), Doc Antle's videos of women dancing with primates, and, most memorably, the country-music videos in which Exotic is shown singing, suspiciously well, about man and cat. When, in 2016, Exotic runs for President—the meme I saw was a clip of a campaign video—he gives out condoms adorned with the slogan "For Your Protection, Vote Joe Exotic." The documentary is a kaleidoscope of terrible taste, and Goode and Chailkin luxuriate in their subjects' mullets, bad cowboy fringes, and acid-blond bleach jobs, which, these days, in fashion-forward circles, amount to a kind of fucked-up glamour. The directors are not judgmental, guided instead by the pleasure principle. Consider the troubling story of Travis Maldonado, one of the young men whom Exotic seduces, we're told, with the help of weed and meth. Maldonado was nineteen when he married Exotic and twenty-three when he accidentally shot himself in the head, a moment witnessed by Exotic's campaign manager as captured by security footage that is included in the fifth episode. This shocking turn is followed by footage in which Exotic, giving a eulogy, describes a sexual maneuver that Maldonado liked to perform. Maldonado is not only a victim of Exotic's egotism; he is a casualty of "Tiger King," too.

But I'm being a downer, aren't I? "Tiger King" is prestige trash: narratively ambitious but self-aware. True crime is far from journalism. (Exotic's history was more thoroughly investigated in a *New York* magazine story by Robert Moor.) In the series' final episode, Exotic, sentenced to twenty-two years on charges of animal abuse and attempted murder for hire, is beamed in from a county jail. His empire has fallen; he has learned, he says, that it is wrong to cage a living thing. Online, viewers have passionately debated Exotic's sentencing. Was he framed? "Tiger King" provides no sense of closure. After bingeing on the seven episodes, I felt hoodwinked, hungover.

So what was it all about? I've sat with a few theories—that "Tiger King" is a takedown of the libertarian ethos, a dispatch from the last frontier of white colonialism, a Trumpian fable. (In late March, Exotic asked the President for a pardon.) The only observation that feels true is that "Tiger King" is what we watched two weeks into our isolation. Comfort television wasn't working; we needed something uglier. For the past four years, we have trained ourselves not to laugh at the antics of bad men; our collective embrace of "Tiger King" speaks of a renewed craving for the crass, the politically incorrect, the culturally insensitive—an outlet for the id now that the ego is under siege. In any case, very briefly, it was the other thing that everyone talked about—and for that reason we were grateful to be horrified. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Julia Suits, must be received by Sunday, April 12th. The finalists in the March 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 27th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“We're trying to teach him not to beg at the table.”
Ben Herschbein, Palm Desert, Calif.

“Past the alligator, through the ring of fire, first door on your left.”
Gregory W. Kirschen, Woodbury, N.Y.

“Let's just say he'll have what you're having.”
Wilson Muller, South Pasadena, Calif.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“I know I don't look familiar, but, believe me, I eat here all the time.”
Phil Walker, Fallston, Md.

WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS
DEVS
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FX ON hulu
NOW STREAMING
DAVE
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PARIS
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